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ABSTRACT

This guide provides advice on effective use of assessments in adult basic and literacy education programs. Chapter 1 considers different types of standardized tests, their purposes, their advantages and limitations, misuses of standardized tests, and other types of assessments. Chapter 2 on informal assessments defines alternative and informal assessment and discusses types of informal assessment, their advantages and limitations, and design of informal assessments. Chapter 3 addresses use of assessments to document learner progress for program accountability, including types of assessment appropriate for program evaluation and accountability, how to standardize a locally developed assessment, and use of qualitative information for program accountability. Chapter 4 covers use of assessments to screen learners and to guide and evaluate instruction. The focus of chapter 5 is assessment of adults for whom English is a second language. Chapter 6 covers assessment strategies to use with students with learning difficulties and making accommodations. Chapter 7 describes the information that should be included in a manual for a commercially developed test and provides a checklist to examine a test to decide if it is appropriate for one's assessment needs. Chapter 8 discusses factors within the learner and the program that affect the testing situation and addresses supportive environments. Appendixes contain the following: test summaries for 11 tests, annotated list of 9 resource organizations, and disability definitions and checklists. Introduction and individual chapters contain references. (YLB)

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Assessment and Adult Learners: Getting the Most from Standardized and Informal Assessment Instruments

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Assessment and Adult Learners: Getting the Most from Standardized and Informal Assessment Instruments

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Introduction

Funders and Researchers Question the Effectiveness of ABLE Programs

Two national studies of ABLE programs concluded that programs have not been effectively collecting or analyzing learner progress data.

Nationally, funders and researchers are asking critical questions about the effectiveness of adult basic and literacy education (ABLE) programs. Two national studies evaluating the performance and quality of ABLE programs have released reports in the past few years. Both studies concluded that evaluating these programs is difficult, because programs have not collected or analyzed information about their activities effectively. Specifically, data on learner progress are often incomplete, inaccurate, or difficult to interpret.

Researchers and practitioners have questioned the validity of assessments used in adult education programs.

Other researchers have questioned the validity of assessments used in adult education programs. Many practitioners agree with the researchers, reporting that standardized tests do not adequately reflect learners' progress nor do they provide enough useful information to guide instruction. Concerns such as these make administering standardized assessments—necessary for program accountability—more difficult and the results less reliable. As a result, ABLE programs have found it difficult to collect credible evidence of their effectiveness and impact on adults' acquisition of basic skills and knowledge.

The lack of convincing evidence about programs substantially increasing learners' skills makes it difficult to justify providing adult education services at public expense.

Furthermore, recent large-scale studies have not found significant overall impacts of adult education on literacy abilities. The lack of convincing evidence about programs substantially increasing learners' literacy skills, coupled with some adult educators' resistance to collecting standardized test data, make it difficult for us to justify providing adult education services at public expense. These questions and concerns, as well as the expected transition to block grant funding, could have a devastating impact on ABLE: funding could be drastically reduced or eliminated, thus leaving adults without essential educational services.

Why Should We, as Adult Educators, Be Concerned about Assessment?

Adult educators play a critical part in the programs' ability to demonstrate learner progress. They must be skilled and knowledgeable about effective assessment practices.

Most of us believe that we are doing good work and that learners enrolled in our programs are making—often miraculous—progress; however, we have not been very successful in documenting these successes. Since learner progress is one of the indicators of program quality or effectiveness, we have a responsibility to both the learners in our ABLE programs and to ourselves to increase our knowledge and skills in the area of assessment. As instructors or tutors in ABLE programs, the question of learner progress affects us as well as learners. When ABLE programs do not document learner progress effectively, it reflects not only on the programs' quality but also on our skills as teachers. We play a critical part in our programs' ability to demonstrate learner progress. Therefore, we need to expand our skills to document learner progress by knowing the various purposes for assessment, understanding the types of assessments and how they are administered and scored, and using both standardized and informal test results to plan and modify instructional plans with the learners.

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Chapter 1

What are the Different Types of Standardized Assessment? How and Why Should I Use Them?

Chapter 1: What are the Different Types of Standardized Assessments? How and Why Should I Use Them?

Introduction

Assessment in adult basic and literacy education (ABLE) programs must satisfy multiple stakeholders, each with different purposes for assessment and interests in the outcomes of the program. Multiple approaches to assessment are necessary to satisfy these various information needs. For example, in community adult literacy programs you may think primarily of two stakeholders—the learner and the instructor. In the case of workplace literacy programs, however, at least two additional stakeholders emerge, namely, the union (if one exists) and the management of the company. Other stakeholders in any ABLE program will be the program administrators and the funding agency, such as the state department of education.

Multiple approaches to assessment are necessary to meet the information needs of all the stakeholders.

ABLE programs traditionally depend on the results of standardized tests to determine changes in participants' basic skills levels and to report pre- and posttest data to the funding agency. The Bureau of ABLE encourages the use of standardized testing to conduct student assessments, reporting that 44% of Pennsylvania's ABLE providers use the *Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)*—by far the most commonly used standardized test in the Commonwealth. On the other hand, 46% of ABLE programs report using "other" assessments, such as portfolios or checklists. This high percentage reflects practitioners' dissatisfaction with standardized instruments. In recent years, practitioners have increasingly relied on observation and informal measures as more authentic measures of learner progress.

The Bureau of ABLE encourages the use of standardized tests to conduct student assessments.

When selecting assessments, consider these three important questions: What are the purposes of assessment? What are the assessment information needs of each stakeholder? What are the strengths and limitations of the various assessment instruments for each of these needs?

What are the Purposes of Assessment?

Assessment instruments in ABLE programs are used to 1) gather intake information for screening and placement in an instructional program; 2) diagnose each individual's educational strengths and weaknesses for developing an instructional plan; and 3) measure learner progress to determine individual skill growth as well as to document the gains of the entire group for program accountability.

Intake assessments yield information for screening and placing learners in an instructional program.

Intake assessments should be conducted in a welcoming and supportive environment. The importance of a successful and reassuring first meeting is well-supported in the research as a key indicator of whether students will participate in the program. Intake assessment first involves an interview to determine each individual's reasons for enrolling, what they want to accomplish and learn (their goals), their interests and talents, and their educational history. Screening or placement testing (such as with the *TABE Locator Test*, the *Adult Placement Indicator*, or a program-developed, informal test) is then administered either individually or in a group to provide a starting point for instruction.

Diagnostic testing identifies each individual's strengths and weaknesses for instructional planning.

Diagnostic testing is conducted when the student is comfortable in the program, usually within the first month of enrollment. This assessment provides more in-depth information about the learner's specific skill strengths and weaknesses. For example, the results of the *TABE Complete Battery*, the *Reading Evaluation Adult Diagnosis* (*READ*), and informal reading inventories provide such diagnostic information. Instructors and tutors then use the information to build on students' strengths and to emphasize skill areas that are weak or missing.

Assessments to measure learner progress document the effectiveness of the program for individuals and for the entire group.

Assessments that *measure learners' progress* are conducted periodically to document the effectiveness of the program for individuals and for the entire group. These assessments may be standardized or informal measures, depending on the stakeholders' needs. It's important, however, that the same assessments used for pretesting be used for interim and posttesting. For example, if a student was pretested with a certain level of the *TABE* and also with a locally developed assessment, these same instruments should also be used for measuring gains.

Who Needs Assessment Information?

Instructors need assessment information for screening and placing learners, instructional planning, and documenting instructional effectiveness. This information should be shared with students on a regular basis.

Instructors need to screen students and place them quickly and comfortably in the appropriate programs. They also need to diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses so they can develop and periodically revise a learning plan that fits individual needs. Instructors also need to measure student progress in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of their instruction to program administrators responsible for reporting data to funding agents and policymakers. *Students*, too, are very interested in knowing more about their educational strengths and weaknesses and their progress in the instructional program. Instructors should share assessment results with students on a regular basis to engage them in the learning process, thus providing an opportunity for collaborative instructional planning.

Funding agents need assessment data for accountability purposes.

Funding agents require assessment data for accountability purposes. Funding agents are not interested in an individual's learning strengths and weaknesses but instead in the progress of a group of students. This progress may be demonstrated by comparing scores on standardized tests before and after a given amount of instruction or time period, or by identifying the competencies or objectives that students have mastered during

Program administrators must submit data on learner progress to the funding agent.

a given period of time. *Program administrators*, while they may be interested in instructional planning for individuals, also must collect assessment data for purposes of accountability. They must submit data on learner progress to the funding agent. These data also will help to formulate and guide the program's improvement plan.

The assessment instruments you use must meet the needs of all the stakeholders. They should be selected to measure what you are teaching and should assist you in documenting program effectiveness and for making program changes if necessary. The following sections provide information on the various assessment instruments and how the data are measured, analyzed, and interpreted to report the learning that is occurring in programs.

Standardized tests have a standard set of directions in administration, scoring, and interpreting results.

What are Standardized Tests?

Standardized tests, as the name suggests, follow a standard set of directions in test administration, scoring, and interpretation. Learners located in different parts of the country, and in different types of programs, should be assessed under the same conditions. Instructors in different programs administer the test and score and interpret the data in the same way. The results can be compared if the standard instructions are followed and learners are all appropriate for the given level of the test.

Standardized tests are developed by testing companies which allocate many resources to ensure that tests are valid and reliable. *Validity* means that a test measures what it is supposed to measure; a test is *reliable* if similar results are obtained each time it is administered to the same learner with no intervening instruction. (See Chapter 7 for detailed information concerning reliability and validity.)

Many standardized tests yield grade equivalents (e.g., third grade reading level) which are not recommended for adult learners.

Many standardized tests yield a score as a *grade equivalent*. Use of a grade equivalent is not recommended when working with adults. Grade equivalent scores do not truly reflect adults' abilities and may project negative connotations. For example, an adult with a third grade equivalent reading level does not behave as a third grader and may be quite competent and skilled in other areas. (The International Reading Association recommends that grade equivalents be abandoned for all students regardless of age.)

Scaled scores and percentiles reflect the distribution of your students' scores.

A better choice is to use *scaled scores* (not raw scores) or *percentiles* which, in general, reflect the distribution of your students' scores. Specifically, scaled scores, such as those provided in the *TABE*, are derived by taking raw scores and converting them to a single interval score (such as 0 through 999) to permit comparison of performance across levels and forms. Percentiles show where individuals place in the distribution of the norming group.

Scaled scores, such as those in the TALS, are replacing grade equivalents as better measures of adults' abilities.

Recently, standardized adult education tests have been influenced by the National Adult Literacy Survey or NALS, which eliminated grade equivalents; instead, student scores are arrayed on a proficiency scale of 500 points. The Educational Testing Service, which created the NALS, also created a commercial version called the *ETS Tests of Applied Literacy Skills* or *TALS* which uses the same proficiency scale. Similarly, the *Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System—CASAS* and *Work Keys* (American College Testing) use *scaled scores* instead of grade equivalents.

Standardized tests have become more contextual.

Standardized tests also have become more contextual in response to the criticism that they measure generic academic skills. The *TABE* now has a workplace literacy assessment for specific occupational clusters. *Work Keys* is oriented to the workplace, and *CASAS* likewise has a test version to assess basic skills in a workplace context.

In summary, standardized tests have standard directions for administration, scoring, and interpretation. They are valid and reliable.

In summary, standardized tests must have standard instructions for administering, scoring, and interpreting data. All students should have the same amount of time to take the test, test administrators should score all tests using the same criteria, and test administrators should come to the same conclusions when interpreting the test results. Standardized tests must be valid and reliable. In other words, they must measure what they are designed to measure. They also must produce similar results if an individual takes the test again without having any intervening instruction.

Advantages and Limitations of Standardized Tests

An advantage of standardized tests is that the results can be summarized to compare program effectiveness.

One advantage of standardized tests is that they yield comparable results regardless of location or program type. Therefore, funding agents and policymakers often rely on them for program accountability. Another advantage is that gains on standardized tests may be useful to program administrators and instructors to get an objective measure of students' progress compared to an external norming group. Testing companies administer their tests to an appropriate target audience that is large enough to establish a norming group (which ideally should represent your student population). Another advantage of standardized tests is that they may show the groups' progress toward meeting specified criteria or competencies.

A limitation of standardized tests is that the content may be irrelevant to what is being taught in the program.

A *limitation* of standardized tests is that the content may be irrelevant to what is being taught in the curriculum and classroom. For example, a workplace literacy program that uses the context of the job for instruction in basic skills should be careful in using standardized tests since the curriculum probably does not match the content of the tests. The standardized test may not reflect the actual gains that students are making in the program because the test may not be assessing the skills that are being taught. (On the other hand, the test may assess the same skills that are taught in the instructional

Another limitation is that the norming group for the test many not be comparable to your student population.

program but in a generic context; then the test may indicate the ability of the students to transfer what is learned to literacy tasks beyond the workplace.) Another limitation to standardized tests is that the group of students may be not comparable to the norming group. For example, a test may be normed on students in general adult basic education programs; however, your students may be non-native speakers of English, disabled, or institutionalized. Comparisons to the norming group should be made only cautiously.

ABLE practitioners may incorrectly administer a standardized test in a variety of ways.

Misuses of Standardized Tests

Sometimes ABLE instructors misuse standardized and norm-referenced tests by:

- ignoring the standardized instructions, giving students as much time as they want to complete the test, for example; test conditions, then, are no longer standard and the results are not comparable to others who are taking the same test.

- using different tests to measure gains before and after instruction; the same test, but a different form, should be used for pre- and posttesting since all tests have different norming groups and standards.

- administering standardized tests on fixed dates (say, fall and spring) regardless of the amounts of time individuals have been in the program; therefore, individuals who have been in a program for 15 hours may be compared to those who have had 30 hours of instruction.

- administering standardized pretests before students feel comfortable in the program; students tend to test below their actual capabilities on the pretest and higher on the posttest when they are familiar with the instructional setting. The result is that the gains due to instruction are not known.

ABLE practitioners may misinterpret or incorrectly report students' scores on standardized tests.

- using an inappropriate level of a standardized test for pre- and posttesting. If students take a test that is too difficult, they score at the "floor" of the test and cannot show what they do know; conversely, if the test is too easy, they score at the "ceiling" and cannot show any growth over time.

- reporting only grade equivalent scores which are actually only gross estimates of abilities; scaled scores are more accurate since they account for the inevitable amount of test error in scores.

- comparing students' test scores to an inappropriate norming group; the norming group used by the test developer can be identified by reading the test's technical manual.

- averaging median or percentile scores for presenting a group's performance; the only scores that should be reported as average or mean scores are scaled and raw scores. (Raw scores are limited because they do not reflect the normative data and cannot be used across test levels.)

What are the Various Types of Assessments?

Traditionally, ABLE programs have used standardized, *norm-referenced* achievement tests in which students' test scores are compared to those of the norming group. Alternatives to norm-referenced achievement tests include criterion-referenced, curriculum-based, performance-based, and other informal tests. Some of these assessments are standardized, such as the *CASAS*; however, many are informal tests developed by curriculum developers or locally by programs.

Norm-referenced tests compare your learners' scores to those of the norming group.

Criterion-referenced assessments have become popular in measuring skill mastery as opposed to norm-referenced tests (e.g., the *TABE*). Instead of comparing an individual's performance to that of others through grade equivalents or scaled scores (as in standardized, norm-referenced tests), the individual's performance is compared to his or her earlier performance in achieving or mastering a particular skill. Instructors find that criterion-referenced testing is useful for competency-based instructional planning since these assessments indicate whether or not an individual has mastered a particular skill at a specified level of competence (say, 80%). *CASAS* is perhaps the best known criterion-referenced literacy assessment in adult education; it is also standardized although not norm-referenced (since the individual's performance is not compared to that of a group).

Criterion-referenced tests indicate whether or not a student has mastered a skill at a specific level of competence (say, 80%).

Curriculum-based tests measure whether or not students have learned what has been taught in a given set of instructional materials.

Curriculum-based assessment refers to tests that assess learning from a given set of curriculum materials. A test at the end of a chapter of instructional materials is a type of curriculum-based assessment. In contrast to criterion-referenced assessment, curriculum-based assessment does not measure skill mastery. Instead, it measures whether or not the learners have learned what has been taught in a given piece or set of instructional materials. Like criterion-referenced assessment, it may be standardized or informal depending on its development.

Performance-based assessments require students to demonstrate their knowledge or skills.

Performance-based assessment also is not new, but it is enjoying renewed interest as a technique for measuring skill applications since it requires demonstration of competency. Some performance assessments require paper-and-pencil responses; others use computer simulations or real-life demonstrations of competency. As a standardized performance-based assessment, the *National External Diploma Program* (American Council on Education) has been assessing adults' competence acquired through life experiences and self-directed learning for many years as an alternative to the GED. New approaches to assessing basic skills through computer-based simulations of real problems encountered in a workplace have been recently devised, such as *A Day in the Life..Assessment* (Curriculum Associates). Computer-based assessment also standardizes test administration and scoring.

Informal assessments, such as portfolios, are more relevant to the assessment needs of learners.

Informal assessments, such as portfolios, have become popular as a supplement—and sometimes a replacement—to standardized tests. Alternative assessments that focus on learners' progress toward either program-specific indicators or self-selected goals are seen by some researchers and practitioners as an effective method for assessing learners in authentic or meaningful contexts. Often, teachers develop informal assessment tools, such as interviews, checklists, or portfolios, that are useful with particular individuals or in a given curriculum. While they may be relevant to the assessment needs of the individual and program, and therefore are valid, they lack demonstrated reliability. Nevertheless, numerous adult educators have argued for this change of direction in assessment.

The usual standardized, norm-referenced tests of adult basic skills, such as the TABE, may not be appropriate for disabled or ESL learners.

Finally, special attention should be given to assessments for learners for whom *English is a Second Language* (ESL) or who may be *disabled.* The usual standardized norm-referenced tests of adult basic skills may not be appropriate for their needs (see Chapters 5 and 6). Dennis (1995) found that ESL providers in Pennsylvania indicated a general satistfaction with commercially available ESL tests, but a relatively heavy use of "assessment tools developed in-house." Also, Cooper (1992) has developed an alternative assessment instrument specifically for learning disabled adults and provided staff development sessions regarding its use. On the other hand, little has been done to address assessment issues concerning other adults with disabilities (e.g., mental retardation, mental illnesses, or physical disabilities).

Summary

ABLE programs must select a variety of standardized and informal tests based on their assessment purposes, the information needs of all stakeholders, and the strengths and limitations of the various tests. Assessment practices should effectively measure what you are teaching and should assist you in documenting program effectiveness and for making program changes if necessary. For example, intake and screening assessments (such as the *TABE Locator Test* or a program-developed informal test) provide a starting point for instruction. Diagnostic tests (such as the *TABE Complete Battery* or an informal reading inventory) guide ongoing instructional planning. Program administrators and funding agents use standardized test data (such as pre- and posttest data on the *TABE* or *CASAS*) to document and compare program effectiveness. Finally, all ABLE program staff and administrators should consistently and carefully document their assessment practices.

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Chapter 2

What are the Different Types of Informal Assessments? How Should I Use Them?

Chapter 2: What are the Different Types of Informal Assessments? How Should I Use Them?

Introduction

Program administrators and funders regularly require information about learner progress, usually in the form of data collected through the administration of standardized instruments which will provide generalizable information. These stakeholders are most interested in the overall effectiveness of ABLE programs. On the other hand, adult education instructors and learners are most interested in individual progress. As a result, they may reject standardized instruments as inadequate, because the tests do not provide sufficient detail about the learners' skills, making it difficult to plan instruction. Instructors also may believe that the standardized test being used does not adequately document learner gains. It may seem that instructors and learners are at cross purposes with administrators and funders. In fact, these differences actually reflect the various purposes for assessment.

Adult education instructors and learners are interested in assessment information that shows individual skill progress.

Efforts to supplement standardized test data often focus on the use of informal assessments. For example, programs might adopt portfolio assessment, teacher-developed checklists and self-assessments, curriculum-based assessments, program-designed interviews, and commercially available rating sheets to assist in collecting additional information about learners' progress. Informal instruments, often developed by program staff, can involve instructors and learners in the assessment process. They can help learners set goals and guide instruction. They also can document changes in a learner's self-esteem or track small steps toward larger goals.

Informal assessments, such as portfolios, checklists, and self-assessments, assist in collecting information about an individual's progress, and can also guide instruction and help learners set goals.

Unfortunately, these same assessment activities fall short in meeting requirements for program accountability. Informal

Informal assessments are valuable tools but not replacements for standardized tests.

instruments are valid within a program; however, the resulting data do not translate across programs or often even across learners in the same program. In many instances, little evidence exists that the instruments are reliable or even that program staff agree on the purpose or outcomes expected from the assessment. As a result, informal assessments are valuable tools but not replacements for standardized tests.

What are Informal Assessments?

The terms informal assessment and alternative assessment are often used interchangeably. In fact, while all informal assessments are alternative assessments, not all alternative assessments are informal.

Defining Alternative Assessment

Alternative assessments are often process-oriented, open-ended, and ongoing.

Alternative assessment refers to two trends in testing. First, alternative assessments refer to tests that are not traditional norm-referenced achievement instruments. Alternative assessments, in this case, can be standardized or informal and include criterion-referenced, curriculum-based, performance-based instruments, and various forms of portfolios. Secondly, alternative assessment refers to assessment practices that vary from traditional approaches often associated with the use of standardized tests. For example, Auerbach (1992) explains that alternative assessments are most often process-oriented, open-ended, and ongoing. They also involve learners in the assessment process and are conducted in a supportive environment. Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters (1992) add that alternative assessments often involve higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills as well as real-world applications. Standardized tests rarely include these attributes; however, ABLE providers *can* adopt more learner-involved and supportive approaches to assessment—even when using traditional standardized tests (See Chapter 8 for additional information).

Many informal tests are teacher-constructed. They are designed to reflect the skills and knowledge presented in the curriculum, the instructional or educational goals of the program, or learners' self-selected goals.

Informal assessments provide an opportunity to integrate ongoing assessment with instruction.

Informal Assessment

Informal tests can be commercial (e.g., curriculum-based tests included with instructional materials) but many are teacher-constructed. Instructors — and, on occasion, learners working with instructors — design informal tests that reflect the skills and knowledge presented in the curriculum, the general instructional/educational goals of the program, or learners' self-selected goals. For example, an instructor may design an informal performance-based assessment to determine learners' ability to perform activities using basic skills and knowledge taught in a customized workplace literacy program (e.g., Learners read tables and charts to solve a specific workplace problem). In another setting, program staff and parents may design an informal criterion-referenced checklist to determine progress in adopting selected family literacy practices (e.g., Parents self-report or instructors observe changes in parent-child reading practices or active participation in children's schooling.). Finally, learners may select personal goals, and with the instructor, develop milestones that document progress toward the goals or criteria for determining achievement of the goals (e.g., The learner's goal may be to learn personal money management. Milestones might include learning to perform math operations associated with budgets and developing a family budget.).

What are the Different Types of Informal Assessment?

Tests usually measure a learner's performance at one point in time. Informal assessment instruments provide an opportunity to integrate *ongoing* assessment with the instructional process. Informal assessments can help track progress as well as finished products as learners move toward improved skills.

The two practices described below encourage instructors and learners to think about and record their observations, using the information to discuss educational progress.

Observation

Instructors purposefully observe learners as they work, looking for effective use of skills or areas that require additional work. Observations may be recorded in unstructured and open-ended or semi-structured *anecdotal records* or *journals*. Unstructured records consist of any notes that the instructor wishes to include about the learner's use of basic skills. For example, comments may vary depending on the literacy task or on the instructor's knowledge of previous assessment results. Semi-structured records might use an observation guide consisting of specific literacy skills to observe and a simple rating of plus (+) or minus (-) to indicate whether the skill was observed or not. You can find samples of observation guides in published assessment guides. After you make a series of observations, meet with learners to discuss your observations, asking learners for their reactions and planning further instructional activities.

Observations may be recorded in unstructured or semi-structured anecdotal records or journals. Frequently discuss observations with learners, asking for their reactions and planning further instructional activities.

Self-Assessments

You should encourage adults to reflect on their learning and explore how and why their work shows progress or the need for additional practice. The process of reflection engages learners in the educational process, demanding that they evaluate their own work, think of possible solutions to identified problem areas, and become responsible for progress toward and eventual achievement of personal goals.

Self-assessments help learners explore how their work shows progress or the need for additional practice.

Self-assessments can take various forms, including, for example, unstructured interviews, reflective journals, or checklists and open-ended surveys. Holt (1994) includes several examples of open-ended surveys and questionnaires; these instruments focus on English as a Second Language learners and family literacy programs but are easily adaptable to other settings.

Self-assessments can include reflective journals, checklists, and open-ended surveys.

Information gathered through the following informal assessments also can be used to plan instruction or to track and document progress toward specified criteria or self-selected goals.

Informal reading inventories can be used to diagnose a learner's skills in oral and silent reading, especially to analyze miscues to guide instruction.

Informal Reading Inventories

Informal reading inventories (IRIs) usually consist of a word list and a series of graded reading passages. The learner reads the word list orally. Depending on the inventory's guidelines, the reading is discontinued when the learner mispronounces a specified number of words. This indicates where the learner should begin reading the passages, usually one paragraph to be read orally and one to be read silently at each grade level. You record miscues (e.g., noting omitted or inserted words and deleted word endings) observed during oral reading. For both the oral and silent reading passages, you ask several vocabulary and comprehension questions, record the responses, and stop the assessment when the learner misses a specified number of questions. IRIs can be used to diagnose a learner's skill in oral and silent reading comprehension as well as identifying reading miscues. This information can then be used to develop an individual education plan and identify appropriate instructional strategies.

Retell exercises help instructors discern learners' text comprehension and facility with language.

Retell Exercises

Retell exercises require your asking learners to tell you what they have read in a selected passage. Although analyzing responses can be difficult, retelling can provide information about learners' text comprehension, use of metacognitive strategies (e.g., connections with prior knowledge, generalizations to real world situations), and facility with language (e.g., organization, audience). Herrmann (1994) includes a format for recording learner responses during retelling.

Analysis of writing samples provides information on specific writing skills and can be used to guide instruction.

Writing Samples

You can collect samples over time to evaluate learners' growth as writers. Analysis of the samples can provide information on specific skills (e.g., use of grammar, spelling, sentence and paragraph structure, use of descriptive words) and direction for instruction and guided practice. Checklists and criteria are available to evaluate various aspects of adults' writing. For example, Bear (1987), and MacKillop and Holzman (1990) include criteria for evaluating writing samples as well as several checklists.

Curriculum-based assessments are closely linked to the curriculum. However, don't overlook other assessments that provide more useful information about learners' skills and progress.

Curriculum-Based Assessments

You can use curriculum-based assessments included with some commercial instructional materials, or you can design assessments based on curricula developed in your program. Although curriculum-based assessments are closely linked to the curriculum, they have drawbacks. Curriculum-based assessments, especially in materials written for adults at the beginning levels of literacy, often rely on literal comprehension and simple recall. The ability to recall and understand information expressed literally in the text is an important skill; however, it provides only limited information about learners' reading comprehension. Also, instructors who depend on curriculum-based assessments may overlook other informal and standardized assessments that might provide more useful information about learners' skills and progress.

When developing curriculum-based assessments, include more complex questions and activities that allow learners to demonstrate what they learned in the curriculum.

Designing curriculum-based assessments may seem easy. It can be if you use only simple vocabulary and recall comprehension questions. Developing more complex questions (e.g., summary, inference, analysis) is time-consuming and often difficult; however, these questions are essential for building critical literacy skills. In addition, consider including activities that allow learners to demonstrate what they have learned in the curriculum. For example, can learners apply skills covered in the curriculum to similar real-world situations?

Logs help learners record situations in which they use their skills outside the classroom.

Logs and Checklists

Adults can be encouraged to keep logs recording situations in which they use reading, writing, speaking, and math outside the classroom. You can suggest that they record what they read, how much they read, when they write, or how often they write. Learners might record situations in which they applied math principles or used reading skills to solve a practical problem. Over time, these logs will include more information as learners become accustomed to thinking about the role that literacy plays in their lives. You can use this information to document learners' application of literacy skills in real-world contexts.

Checklists provide more structure than logs and make it easier to analyze the collected information.

Checklists are more structured than logs, making it easier to analyze the information you are collecting. You can use existing checklists or develop new lists to meet your specific needs or learners' goals. For example, existing checklists can be found in McGrail and Purdom (1992), McGrail and Schwartz (1993), and Auerbach (1992).

Portfolios range from strictly personal to broad yet systematic and purposeful collections of student work.

Portfolio Assessment

You can select from a number of portfolio approaches, ranging from the strictly personal to broad yet systematic collections of student work. Portfolios, however, are not merely work folders. They are *purposeful collections* of work that demonstrate progress or achievement in selected areas of study. Portfolios may be process-oriented (i.e., collection of writing samples in various stages of completion) or product-oriented (i.e., collection of finished projects).

Portfolios can focus on one aspect of learners' work (e.g., writing or math skills) or include several areas. They might focus on collecting information to document learners' progress toward developing workplace competencies. For example, adults in a job preparation class may document their ability to be punctual by maintaining an ongoing record of their class

Portfolio contents may be skills-oriented or they may be more personal, such as records of how the program impacted the learners' lives.

arrival times; the list can be verified by project staff. On the other hand, a portfolio can be very personal, focusing on collecting evidence to document the impact of program participation on the learner's life. For example, parents may collect their children's report cards showing improvements in attendance and grades as an example of the impact their participation in an ABE class has had on their children's lives. This portfolio has limited value for tracking the learner's progress in developing basic skills; however, it may be invaluable to the individual as visual evidence of education's value.

Discuss with learners the specific requirements and expectations for the portfolio assessment before beginning the process.

Learners must be prepared to use portfolio assessment, since collecting and analyzing the work depends on their involvement in the process. Although you can, with the learner's permission, add work to the portfolio, the primary responsibility lies with the learner. Therefore, it's important to detail the specific requirements and expectations for the portfolio assessment before beginning the process. Set goals or outline the expected outcomes, identify the types of information that should be collected to demonstrate progress, and list criteria that will be used to evaluate the portfolio contents. As learners add material to the portfolio, they should include a brief explanation of why the material is important. This will provide an ongoing record of the learner's thoughts about their work. Finally, work with the learner on a regular basis to review the portfolio contents and summarize progress toward the selected goals or outcomes.

Advantages and Limitations of Informal Assessments

Informal assessments usually match the program's curriculum or educational goals.

Informal assessments are valid for a program since they usually match the program's curriculum or educational goals. Informal instruments are often more meaningful to learners since they can document steps or milestones toward achieving learners' long term goals. Instructors and learners can see progress that might not be evident in standardized test scores. For example, a process portfolio allows learners to follow their

They provide opportunities for instructors and learners to make joint decisions about individual education plans and goals.

development from writing one sentence to a paragraph to several connected paragraphs. Or, a reading log might allow learners—and the instructor— to track increases in the amount and type of reading done outside of class. As a procedure rather than a formal test, informal assessments also can provide opportunities for instructors and learners to make joint decisions about individual educational plans and goals.

Informal assessments may lack a clear purpose or may be poorly designed. They also may lack reliability.

Although informal instruments are valid within a program, they have several drawbacks. Informal assessments may lack a clear purpose or may be poorly designed and organized, confounding your efforts to collect meaningful information about learners' skills. These instruments also may lack reliability, making it difficult to ensure that the scores are meaningful measures of improvement.

Designing Informal Assessments

How can you develop effective informal assessments for your program? The disadvantages of informal assessments stem from their lack of clear purpose, meaningful design and organization, and reliability. To avoid these drawbacks, plan carefully before you begin developing the instrument. First, decide on the purpose of the assessment:

- What are you trying to measure?
- How will you use the information you collect?

Plan carefully before you begin developing informal instruments.

After you clarify the purpose of the assessment, identify specific goals or expected outcomes:

- What should learners be able to do?
- How will they demonstrate the outcome?
- What are the long-term and short-term goals to be reached?

Finally, select criteria for measuring the learners' level of success:

- What milestones have learners reached that show progress toward their goals?
- How will we define progress"?

For example, the learner might be expected to write a cohesive paragraph consisting of a topic sentence and three supporting details. A milestone may be reached when the learner writes a coherent sentence on a single topic. A second milestone may be reached when the learner can write two coherent sentences on a single topic and a title (topic idea).

Group decisions should address the purpose of the assessment, key outcomes or process to be measured, procedures for administration, and guidelines for scoring item and interpreting results.

Reliable assessments provide meaningful information about learner progress. ABLE providers who develop informal assessments should approach the process carefully. Development should involve administrators, instructors, and, if feasible, learners as decisions are made concerning the purpose of the assessment, key outcomes or process to be measured, procedures for administration, and guidelines for scoring items and interpreting results. Without discussion, for example, instructors may not agree on definitions of progress or success (e.g., How is "little progress" or "much improved" defined? Do all staff agree on the meaning of an individual's score of "4" on a checklist?). Lack of agreement on these issues will affect the instrument's reliability.

Informal assessments may be standardized, although the process is time-consuming and costly.

Some programs undertake standardizing their informal assessments. Although these efforts would improve the assessment's reliability and, therefore, its usefulness for reporting purposes, the assessment may also lose some of the flexibility that initially made it effective. In addition, standardizing informal measures is a time-consuming and expensive process; however, some programs choose to proceed (See Chapter 3, pages 3.4 - 3.7 on standardizing informal tests as well as Chapter 7 on selecting assessments for additional details).

Summary

Instructors and learners are most interested in individual progress. As a result, they often supplement standardized test data with information gathered through informal assessments.

Informal assessments are valuable tools for supplementing standardized test data with information about individual progress.

Informal instruments can include, for example, portfolio assessment, teacher-developed checklists and self-assessments, curriculum-based assessments, program-designed interviews, and commercially available rating sheets. Using informal assessments can involve instructors and learners in the assessment process, help learners set goals, guide instruction, document changes in a learner's self-esteem, or track progress toward larger goals. These tools are valid within a program; however, the resulting data do not translate across programs nor is there evidence that the instruments are reliable. As a result, informal assessments are valuable tools but usually do not meet all requirements for program reporting and accountability.

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Chapter 3

How Can I Use Assessments to Document Learner Progress for Program Accountability?

Chapter 3: How Can I Use Assessments to Document Learner Progress for Program Accountability?

Introduction

Program administrators want data to document the effectiveness of their programs.

All stakeholders want information on program outcomes. Program evaluation and accountability, for example, are of particular concern to program administrators who must demonstrate to funding agents that students are effectively learning and meeting their goals through program participation.

Funding agents want data that can be aggregated and used to describe the progress of groups of students.

Funding agents are no longer satisfied with numerical reports of student attendance. They want data that can be aggregated and used to describe the progress of groups of students. Although they may be interested in individual progress, more importatnt is information that can be summarized to allow comparisons of learner gains across programs. Their interest in data focuses on the general impact that adult basic and literacy education programs have on participants' skills and, ultimately, in their lives.

Instructors need objective evidence about their instructional effectiveness.

Instructors also should be interested in program accountability. Instructors are usually the single largest influence on students' achievement. So, if a program is effective, it suggests that instructors are also effective. While instructors have a "gut" sense of their effectiveness from student feedback and observation, they may also find it worthwhile to have objective evidence about instructional effectiveness.

Program effectiveness must be demonstrated over time.

Program effectiveness must be demonstrated over time. A single snapshot does not provide enough information to determine whether students are learning in a particular instructional program. Most programs chart their progress over a number of years to determine program effectiveness. Some also conduct follow-up studies of program completers, as well as of dropouts, to identify factors influential in making the program successful for some individuals and to identify barriers to success for others.

What Types of Assessments are Appropriate for Program Evaluation and Accountability?

Standardized tests are superior to non-standardized assessments for program accountability. Group results rather than individual data are reported for accountability.

Because standardized tests (given correct test administration) ensure that results may be compared across programs and across the same program at different points in time, they are superior to non-standardized (i.e., informal) assessments for program evaluation and accountability. Non-standardized assessments do not permit such comparisons. In addition, group results, rather than individual data, are usually reported for program evaluation and accountability. Standardized tests are appropriate for these purposes, since test scores may be averaged and charted to display learning gains for a group of learners over time.

Standardized tests may be norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, curriculum-based, or performance-based.

Standardized tests may be norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, curriculum-based, or performance-based (or a combination of these types). The types of resulting information, however, vary depending on the type of assessment. When selecting an instrument, providers should consider both test validity and reliability—both are critical in choosing a test appropriate for your program. (See Chapter 7 for a detailed discussion of selecting assessments.)

Most funding agencies prefer that student progress be measured by standardized, norm-referenced tests.

Standardized tests that are *norm-referenced* compare learners to a previously established group of comparable individuals. For example, the *Tests of Adult Basic Education* (*TABE*) has been normed on three representative groups: learners in adult basic education programs, adults in vocational/technical programs, and adult/juvenile offenders in correctional settings. The *TABE* and the *Test of Adult Literacy Skills* (*TALS*) are both norm-referenced. They yield scaled scores which provide a reliable indication of student growth. Most funding agencies prefer that student progress be measured by standardized, norm-referenced assessments.

Criterion-referenced assessments are appropriate for program accountability since they indicate students' mastery of skills or competencies

However, standardized *criterion-referenced* assessments, such as the *Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System* (*CASAS*), are also appropriate for program evaluation and accountability. Because they indicate students' mastery of specific skills or competencies, they may be an even better indicator of learners' progress during instruction.

Curriculum-based assessments are usually not used for program evaluation and accountability.

Curriculum-based assessments, even if standardized, are usually not used for program evaluation and accountability since they measure learning resulting from a particular curriculum. Examples of curriculum-based assessments include tests included in the *Challenger* and *Number Power* series of textbooks. For comparisons to be meaningful, all learners would have to use the same curriculum. The major exception is the *GED Test* which is a well-established curriculum-based assessment.

Performance-based tests require the student to demonstrate skills or competencies.

Performance-based measurement may be incorporated into one of the other types of assessment if a demonstration of learning is required. Performance-based assessments are often also criterion-referenced, requiring a demonstration of skill or competency mastery. The *National External Degree Program* (*NEDP*), for example, guides an adult through a series of activities to document their ability to apply literacy skills in typical adult situations, such as renting an apartment. The number of skills or competencies mastered before and after instruction is reported for program evaluation and accountability. Standardized, performance-based assessments, such as the *NEDP*, may be used for program evaluation and accountability. And, learners frequently find this type of assessment meaningful since they can see objective evidence of what they have learned. Performance-based assessments may also be

Informal assessments are usually not appropriate for program accountability.

Programs may choose to standardize a locally developed assessment.

This first step is to create items that closely measure what is being taught in your curriculum.

particularly useful for non-native speakers and disabled individuals who may not perform at their best on paper-and-pencil standardized tests.

Informal tests are usually not appropriate for the purposes of program evaluation and accountability because they do not permit comparisons across programs. However, an informal assessment could become "standardized" by using standard directions for administration and, therefore, could provide useful information to a program. The limitation is that this assessment is unique to the program and, therefore, not useful to funding agents and other external audiences for accountability purposes.

How Can I Standardize a Locally Developed Assessment?

Some programs prefer to use locally developed assessments that match their curricula. Most funding agencies, however, do not accept data from these assessments as the sole source of evidence about program effectiveness. Nevertheless, these assessments may have enough usefulness to a local program that an effort to standardize them is undertaken. Once the assessments are standardized, they may become useful to other programs with similar types of students and curricula.

The process of standardizing a locally developed assessment requires time and expertise. The first step is to create items that closely measure what is being taught in your curriculum. If the items assess what you are teaching, your assessment will be valid for use in your program. If your assessment is criterion-referenced, then students who have been taught the assessed skills and presumably mastered them should score almost 100% on your assessment.

Next, you should write standardized directions that all teachers and tutors will use in test administration. The

Write standardized directions for administration, scoring, and reporting data.

assessment does not necessarily have to be timed, but it should be administered consistently. Procedures for scoring and reporting the data should also be standardized.

Pilot test the instrument. Ask students about items they missed.

The assessment should be carefully reviewed by colleagues for suggestions about the directions and wording for items as well as the format. After revisions, pilot test the instrument to determine directions or items that are unclear or poorly written. You can ask students about items that they miss, trying to determine why they answered as they did.

Look for patterns in frequently missed items. Seek the help of a local university for data analysis and determining reliability.

You should collect data, i.e., the items that are answered correctly and missed by each student, from a minimum of about 50 students that take the assessment. Even on paper you may begin to see patterns — for example, that students with a certain level of competence tend to miss given items. The formula for calculating reliability is influenced by the number of items in the assessment; therefore, a longer assessment is likely to be more reliable. One approach is to seek the help of a local university for data analysis in determining the reliability of the assessment.

Computer programs can perform an item analysis to identify items that students with high total scores get right.

You may also calculate reliability with computer programs in which an item analysis will tell you how closely each item correlated with the students' total scores. If your test is a mastery or criterion-referenced test, you want items that students with high total scores get right. You may want to eliminate or reword items that students with high total scores miss.

Collect data over an extended period of time to create local norms.

To create local norms, you need to collect data over a period of time. Ultimately, you will be able to see that students with different mastery levels score differently on your assessment. At that point, the assessment can help you determine the instruction needed by a new student as well as demonstrate program effectiveness when it is used after instruction. It may also become useful to other programs with a similar curriculum.

How Can I Use Qualitative Information for Program Accountability?

Qualitative data that have been appropriately quantified can be used to demonstrate program effectiveness.

The above effort of standardizing a locally developed assessment may not seem worth the trouble—which is why programs tend to use commercial standardized tests. You can, however, use qualitative information for program accountability if you quantify the data. The reason for quantifying qualitative data is to enhance reporting to funding agencies and other external audiences. Along with changes in standardized test scores, qualitative data which have been quantified can demonstrate that the changes are due to the impact of the program.

Case studies of students in your program are an example of qualitative data that can be quantified.

Sometimes programs may include case studies of selected clients who have, for example, moved from adult basic education classes to obtaining the GED or high school diploma, and into better paying, satisfying jobs. These qualitative data, in the form of case studies, are important evidence of program effectiveness. However, case studies can also provide quantitative data which is useful in program accountability.

Collect student outcome data, such as the numbers of students in your program who have found jobs or moved on to the next educational level.

You may quantify these data by collecting evidence of program effectiveness over time. Some of these items are already reported to funding agencies in terms of numbers of students who have found jobs or moved to the next educational level. Some are less obvious and may require some special effort to collect, such as being able to help children with homework, being able to ask questions at work (in the case of ESL learners), and being able to use the transportation system.

A suggested procedure is to interview students who are succeeding in their educational programs or who are recent

Combine all the student outcomes in a list that is used to systematically and periodically collect data.

program graduates. Determine how the program has affected their lives, both in important as well as small ways. Combine all the outcomes that the students name into a list, leaving space for others that may be named by other students. Then systematically and periodically collect this information from students through interviews and record it on a checklist. For each student you would have not only the results of assessment instruments but also a list of reported outcomes from participation in the classes.

Aggregate the outcome data to document program effectiveness.

When you are asked to provide information for program accountability, you can aggregate the outcome data for your students, saying, for example, that 80% of the students reported that they were better able to help their children with homework, and so forth. If you have access to a computer database program, such as *FileMaker Pro*, you can enter the data about each student in the database. You can search the database for particular outcomes, such as "child's homework". It will then list the number of times that the outcome was mentioned by your students. The quantitative data can also be accompanied by case studies which bring alive the accomplishments of your students.

Summary

Most funding agencies prefer standardized, norm-referenced test data that document learner progress for program accountability. Other types of tests, when properly administered and reported, can also provide data for program accountability. For example, a standardized and criterion-referenced assessment such as *CASAS* indicates students' mastery of specific skills and can be a reliable indicator of learners' progress during instruction. Programs may also standardize a locally developed test, although the process requires considerable time and expertise. Finally, programs may also use qualitative data (e.g., case studies) that have been properly quantified to document program effectiveness.

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Chapter 4

How Can I Use Assessments to Screen Learners and Guide and Evaluate Instruction?

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Introduction

At the program level, test results are used to refer learners for additional services, place them in appropriate instructional levels, and diagnose their strengths and weaknesses to guide instruction and assist learners in setting realistic goals.

Test results should provide useful information to both instructors and learners. Unfortunately, learners—and, too often, instructors—perceive testing as a necessary evil, gathering essentially meaningless numbers for program reporting and accountability. While program accountability is a significant purpose for assessment, it may seem unimportant to instructors and even less so to learners. However, test information is critical at the program level, because assessment is an essential component of instruction. At the program level, you should use test results to refer learners for additional services, place learners in appropriate educational settings and instructional levels, and diagnose learners' strengths and weaknesses to guide instruction and assist learners in setting realistic goals.

Screening

A quick, global assessment of basic skills during an initial interview can be used for referral or initial placement.

Adults entering an ABLE program should be given immediate, honest, and supportive feedback concerning the match between their goals and the program's ability to help them achieve those goals. Information collected during an initial interview, therefore, should include a quick, global assessment of basic skills. A global assessment can accomplish one of two purposes: referral or initial placement.

A global assessment of basic skills may be used to refer the learner to a more appropriate program, if necessary, or for additional screening.

A global assessment of basic skills can provide enough information to refer the adult to other or additional services, if necessary. For example, an adult may want to enroll in a GED preparation class. On completing a basic skills screening test, however, it appears that the adult would be better served in a literacy program. The GED program may encourage that adult to enroll in another community program if theirs does not provide basic literacy services. Results from the basic skills screening, with other information collected during an intake interview (e.g., school experience, learning preferences), might also suggest that the learner be referred for additional screening, such as vision, hearing, or learning disabilities screening (See Appendix C for sample checklists) or professional services. Professional services, for example, might diagnose and document a learner's specific learning disability which, in turn, would allow that person to take a modified version of the GED test (See Chapter 6 for additional information on adults with learning difficulties).

A global assessment is also used to place the learner in the appropriate level of instruction or materials.

A second purpose for administering a global assessment is to place the adult in an appropriate setting for instruction. In this case, additional testing to determine specific strengths and weaknesses would be scheduled at a later time. For example, an adult may wish to begin an English as a Second Language instructional program immediately. If feasible, the ABLE provider would administer a screening instrument to determine whether the adult should be placed in a beginning, intermediate, or advanced class. Providers who use specific instructional materials also may use screening to place the learner in the appropriate level of the materials. For example, both New Reader's Press *Challenger* series and Steck-Vaughn's *Reading for Today* series include placement tools. [NOTE: These are only examples and not meant as an endorsement of either series.]

Screening instruments provide a global view of learners' skills rather than specific diagnostic information. Also, they are not appropriate for general reporting purposes.

Some assessment instruments—or sections of instruments—are appropriate for rapid screening of basic skills. These instruments may be standardized or informal; therefore, programs can choose instruments that meet their specific program design and assessment plans. When using screening instruments, remember that: 1) the results provide a global (or general) view of the learner's basic skills rather than a diagnostic profile of strengths and weaknesses, 2) the instruments used are not appropriate for accountability or general reporting purposes (i.e., They are either parts of tests or informal measures.), and 3) the instruments should be brief, taking between 5 and 20 minutes to administer.

Programs may use standardized screening instruments, such as TABE Locator Test or SORT.

Programs may use a standardized instrument, such as the locator test in the *Tests of Adult Basic Education* (TABE) or the screening instrument based on the *Basic English Skills Test* (BEST). The first is appropriate for native speakers of English, and the second is appropriate for non-native speakers. The *Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System* (CASAS) also includes a placement instrument, the *Life Skills Appraisal*, as does the *Adult Basic Learning Examination* (ABLE). Some programs use the *Slosson Oral Reading Test* (SORT) or the *Adult Learning Employment-Related Tasks* (ALERT) as screening instruments.

They also may use informal measures, such as word lists and cloze passages.

Informal screening may include word lists within informal reading inventories, short pretests included with commercially available instructional materials, or teacher-made instruments (e.g., functional word lists; cloze passages; retell exercises with short, graded reading passages; learner-selected reading passages). In each example, however, the results of the screening test will provide a global measure of basic skills to assist the provider in either referring learners to other or additional services or to place them in an appropriate learning environment.

Planning and Evaluating Instruction

Instructors may use standardized or informal tests to determine learners' skills strengths and weaknesses to plan, guide, and evaluate instruction.

Instructors may use a variety of assessments to determine learners' strengths and weaknesses in basic skills. These instruments may be standardized or informal, depending on the ABLE provider's philosophy about and plan for learner assessment. For example, some programs may use only a standardized diagnostic basic skills test to place learners and to guide instruction. Other programs prefer to use informal assessments to determine specific instructional goals. Instructors should

Instructors should use assessments that provide diagnostic profiles for determining an individual's skill strengths and weaknesses. Survey tests typically do not provide information on specific types of skills errors.

Informal assessments also can be used to effectively guide instruction.

identify learners' strengths and weaknesses soon after they enroll in the program and then work with the learners to develop an individual education plan (IEP). This diagnosis, however, provides only initial instructional goals. The instructor should meet with the learner on a regular basis to revise the educational plan and identify alternative instructional strategies in areas where the learner has not made progress.

When using standardized tests to diagnose skills, instructors should use instruments that provide diagnostic profiles rather than survey tests which, typically, do not provide information on specific types of skill errors. For example, the *TABE Complete Battery* provides a diagnostic profile of skills for each level of the test. On the other hand, the *TABE Survey* does not include a diagnostic profile of specific skills. Although skilled instructors can evaluate individual items to determine the types of skills missed on the test, the number of items is limited and may lead to an inaccurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, the *BEST* suggests that the instructor review specific sections of the assessment to determine the learners' competence in language use. For example, the learner may be proficient at handling money but have difficulty telling time. Reviewing *BEST* subscores also may reveal that the learner is skilled in listening comprehension but has difficulty speaking. This information, then, can be used to plan instruction.

You can also use informal assessments effectively to guide instruction (See Chapter 2 for descriptions of informal assessments). Instructors may use commercially available or teacher-constructed tests to identify specific skill strengths and weaknesses. Informal reading inventories, cloze passages, and retell exercises can provide detailed information about the learner's word recognition and comprehension skills. Holistic scoring of writing samples can identify a learner's skill in using grammatical structures and vocabulary as well as ability to produce a cohesive paragraph. Teacher-created math problems can determine a learner's skill in performing specific operations; word problems can identify the learner's ability to read math-focused vocabulary and apply math operations. Some informal assessments incorporate activities that learners perform to demonstrate their ability to apply basic skills in specific contexts; these are performance-based assessments and can be standardized or informal. For example, learners might register to vote and bring a voter registration card and receipt to you to demonstrate that they had successfully registered and voted. Others may incorporate completing tasks at various skill levels. For example, a beginning reader might interpret simple written directions, and a more advanced reader might interpret multi-step written directions.

Portfolios and observations may also provide useful information about learners' skill strengths and weaknesses as well as evidence of learner gains.

You also may identify skill strengths and weaknesses by observing learners as they complete instructional tasks; these observations may be recorded in checklists or anecdotal records and reviewed to identify skill strengths and weaknesses. In addition, many ABLE providers incorporate various types of portfolio assessment as a strategy for collecting information about learners' strengths and weaknesses as well as evidence of progress. Analyzing portfolio contents and teacher observations can provide information that guides or modifies instruction.

Setting Educational Goals

Instructors and learners should work together to use assessment results as a basis for planning instruction and setting personal goals.

In addition to guiding instruction, teachers should use assessment results to assist learners in setting realistic goals. Assessment is an integral part of instruction. Learners as well as instructors should view assessment results as a basis for planning instruction and setting personal goals. As such, assessment is a powerful strategy for engaging the learner in the educational process and building a more equitable relationship between the instructor and learner. By engaging learners in the assessment process, the instructor relinquishes a meaure of control over the educational plan. Learners then assume more responsibility for determining the educational plan and setting realistic goals based on test results.

Adult learners may have had little or no experience discussing test results with an instructor or being asked for their personal educational goals. As a result, they may be hesitant to offer their opinions or may not be willing to explore alternative goals. For example, an adult who wishes to obtain a GED may not want to change that goal even when faced with test scores indicating that the goal is unrealistic. Initially, you should redirect the discussion to specific skill areas. If the learner has stronger math skills than reading skills, the suggestion might be to focus on that area of strength, building related reading skills through a math-focused instructional plan.

Adult learners may be reluctant to offer opinions or explore alternative goals.

On the other hand, instructors using competency-based tests, such as *CASAS*, might discuss areas in which the learner has shown competence. The learner may wish to build greater competence in those areas but also work to improve skills in selected areas of weakness. For example, an adult may have strong skills in competencies listed under consumer economics but be weak in those related to government and law. This learner's immediate educational goals may be to expand the level of competence in selected areas of consumer economics but focus on building competence in understanding individual legal rights (one of the *CASAS* competencies in government and law). In each case, you should act as an expert facilitator, guiding the learner yet encouraging greater responsibility for selecting relevant and realistic educational goals.

The instructor should act as an expert facilitator, guiding the learner yet encouraging responsibility for selecting educational goals.

Summary

Test results are critical at the program level because assessment is integral to instruction. Assessment information should be used to refer learners for additional services, make appropriate instructional placements, guide instruction, and assist

Assessment information should be used to refer learners for additional services, make appropriate instructional placements, guide instruction, and assist learners in setting realistic goals.

learners in setting realistic goals. ABLE providers may attempt to locate one assessment instrument to fit all purposes; however, this is not realistic. The "ultimate" test—one size fits all—does not yet exist. Rather, think clearly about the purposes of assessment and select instruments that best fit each purpose. For the purpose of screening learners and guiding instruction, perhaps one assessment is appropriate. It may be more realistic, however, to select several instruments that are valid (i.e., The tests measure, as much as possible, the skills and knowledge taught in the program's curriculum.) and that meet both the instructor's and the learner's informational needs.

Tests

See Appendix A and G. B. Jackson's *Measures for Adult Literacy Programs* (available through Pennsylvania Literacy Resource Centers and Professional Development Centers) for additional test information.

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Chapter 5

How Can I Assess Adults for Whom English is a Second Language (ESL)?

Chapter 5: How Can I Assess Adults for Whom English is a Second Language (ESL)?

Introduction

ESL practitioners must address complex issues when developing an assessment plan.

No single test or type of test can address the complex assessment issues facing ESL practitioners. Commercially available, standardized tests, like the *Basic English Skills Test* (*BEST*) or *CASAS*, provide quantifiable information (such as a student's listening comprehension proficiency), but they may not accurately reflect the student's true communicative abilities in real-life situations. And while informal assessments, such as portfolios or presentations, may provide a more accurate picture of what learners actually can do and say in the English language, they often do not provide the kinds of data that administrators and funders need to demonstrate and compare program effectiveness.

ESL assessment practices vary with the scope and mission of the program, the specific kinds of services provided, and the learners' cultural and educational backgrounds and needs.

In addition, assessment practices in ESL programs vary with the vision and scope of the program, the specific kinds of services provided, and the learners' cultural and educational backgrounds and needs. For example, assessment practices in an ESL workplace literacy program funded by an employer may be quite different from those in a local community-based literacy program that teaches basic communication skills for recent Russian immigrants who must learn both the English language and its alphabet. In another setting, two teachers might meet for the first time with 80 students who wish to enroll for an evening class. Intake assessment in this program would differ greatly from one in which an intake counselor interviews only a few students enrolling in the program.

Despite this complexity and diversity, current research and practice suggest that effective ESL programs use a combination of commercially available, standardized tests as well as

Effective ESL programs use a combination of commercially available, standardized tests as well as program-developed informal assessments.

program-developed informal assessments. This chapter does not identify or prescribe specific tests that should be included in an assessment plan since programs and their clientele vary so widely. Rather, it describes key issues to help ESL providers develop or refine their assessment practices. When choosing assessments, ESL providers must consider the learners' cultural and educational backgrounds and their levels of proficiency with the English language. They should also consider whether to test in the students' native language.

Learners' Cultural and Educational Backgrounds

Consider the cultural and educational backgrounds of learners when choosing assessments.

Consider the cultural and educational backgrounds of your learners when choosing tests. If students are well educated in their first language, they can rely on their knowledge regarding oral and written language when learning a second language. Conversely, if a student's native culture does not have a written form of language or provide public educational opportunities, this student is not likely to perform well on a standardized achievement test.

Examine the development and content of the test in the manual.

Consideration must also be given to the development and content of the test. Was it normed on ESL adults? Do test items require cultural background knowledge that may be unfamiliar to your learners? Minimally, students should be somewhat familiar with the testing procedures, content, and structure of the test items. Consult the test manual before selecting an instrument. Information on norming, test bias, and appropriateness for selected audiences should be included in the technical manual for any standardized test.

Learners' Proficiency with English

Choice of ESL assessments depends also on the language proficiency levels of the learners.

Choice of assessments in an ESL program depends also on the language proficiency levels of the learners. Giving a complicated grammar test to a beginning student would not be appropriate. Similarly, a simple verbal assessment would not provide an accurate measure of an advanced student's ability to read and comprehend a complex technical manual. Effective ESL assessment decisions should consider what students can do with the language, not only what they know about the language. In addition, demonstrating that students have moved from one level to another is an appropriate assessment of progress. The following guide (used with permission of the author, Dr. Judith Rance-Roney) illustrates the various English language proficiency levels:

An ESL beginner has little or no abilities in the English language.

Beginner

A learner at this level may have little or no ability to speak, read, or write English and would be unable to function independently using the language. In listening, only short utterances, simple courtesy expressions, and main themes are comprehended. In writing, this student can copy, list, and label concrete terms and may be able to fill in simple autobiographical information on forms.

An advanced beginner has some ability to satisfy immediate communication needs in English.

Advanced Beginner

This learner will have some ability to operate in a limited capacity and to satisfy immediate needs in English. In listening, this learner will be able to decipher the main idea of a dialog. A writer at this level will be able to produce simple paragraphs using familiar materials, and may read short passages with general comprehension.

Beginning-intermediate learners can understand easy questions and answers and hold simple conversations.

Beginning-Intermediate

A learner at this level will be able to satisfy survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements. The learner can understand easy questions and answers and hold simple face-to-face conversations. In reading, the learner will be able to read for information and identify supporting details. The learner can write letters and short compositions using simple grammatical structures.

Intermediate ESL learners are able to converse with native speakers and are understood when discussing familiar topics.

Intermediate

The full intermediate learner will be able to converse with native speakers and will be understood when discussing familiar topics. Listening may be selective, and the listener can identify mood and attitude of the speaker. Polite expressions are mastered at this level. In reading, the use of context clues and the skills of skimming and scanning are possible. Writers are able to take notes in class, and to write using common terms and vocabulary which is comprehensible to the a native speaker, but would be labeled simplistic.

Advanced ESL learners communicate well at work and meet social demands of conversation.

Advanced

This learner can communicate well at work and can adequately satisfy the social demands of conversation with some sensitivity to both informal and formal language. Listening comprehension now can include abstract discussion and the details of everyday non-technical conversation. Abstract material can be comprehended in reading as well. Academic reading in history, cultural and moral issues, and politics is within this ability range. This writer can use both informal and formal prose, paraphrase and summarize, and produce complex sentence structures with adequate accuracy.

Programs must also consider whether to test in a student's native language.

Testing in Native Languages

Programs must also consider whether to test in a student's native language when choosing assessments. This decision depends, in part, on the reason for testing. If a student is being tested on his knowledge of a particular content area (e.g., history or biology), then it is appropriate to test in the native language. For example, the results of the Spanish version of the *GED Test* should accurately assess a Spanish-speaking student's subject knowledge. On the other hand, if you are assessing a student's competency in English rather than his or her subject knowledge, the testing should be done in English.

Programs which follow a bilingual literacy model are more likely to test in a student's native language.

The decision to test in a student's native language also depends on the scope and mission of the program. Programs which follow a bilingual literacy model are more likely to test in a student's native language. The *TABE*, for example, is available in a Spanish version to measure the basic reading, math, and language skills of Spanish-speaking adults. Many programs also develop informal tests in the student's native language and rely on bilingual staff for administering the assessments.

How Can I Assess Learners' Backgrounds and Proficiency Levels?

Intake and Placement

Providers can collect essential background information during an intake interview.

Providers can collect essential information during an initial intake interview. A one-on-one interview helps staff gather relevant background information about the learner's oral language proficiency, native language literacy and education, previous English language instruction, goals and reasons for enrollment, and learning styles or preferences. Sometimes a translator may be necessary. A questionnaire should be used to guide the interview. Students with higher levels of English proficiency can complete the questionnaire independently, thus providing additional information about their writing skills.

Placement tests help to place students in the appropriate level of instruction.

In addition, placement tests, such as the *CASAS ESL Appraisal Test* and the oral component of the *BEST* are used to place students in the appropriate level of instruction. They usually involve a short survey or locator test to initially place the student in a broad ability level, such as beginner, intermediate, or advanced. This initial placement also helps to identify appropriate instructional materials.

Diagnosis

Based on the level identified by the locator test, additional testing is often administered to collect baseline data for measur-

Diagnostic testing provides information about a learner's strengths and weaknesses in specific skills areas.

ing student progress and to obtain diagnostic information. Diagnostic testing provides information about an individual learner's strengths and weaknesses in specific skill areas, such as oral proficiency, grammatical knowledge, listening and reading comprehension, and writing competence. The *BEST*, for example, provides diagnostic information that can be used to develop individual education plans. An item by item review might indicate that an individual is able to correctly fill out forms but may have difficulty reading job advertisements in a newspaper.

Measuring Student Progress

Standardized tests and informal tests can be used to measure student progress.

Periodic assessments of academic gain, achievement toward goals, and attainment of competence are needed to measure individual progress as well as group progress for program accountability. The same assessments used for pretesting should be used for interim and posttesting. In addition, it is often valuable to use alternative assessment procedures when measuring student progress for evaluating a student's educational plan. Audio tapes, writing samples, journals, and checklists can be used effectively with ESL students. These more informal methods also provide simple yet relevant information for the student.

Summary

Assessment practices in ESL programs vary widely with the scope and vision of the program, the specific kinds of services provided, and the information needs of the various stakeholders. However, all ESL programs should select and use assessment instruments based on their learners' cultural and educational backgrounds, learners' English language proficiency levels, and programmatic decisions regarding assessment in the students' native languages. A complete assessment plan should include a variety of commercially available, standardized tests as well as program-developed informal tests that address all purposes of assessment.

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Chapter 6

What Assessment Strategies Should I Use for Students with Learning Difficulties?

Chapter 6: What Assessment Strategies Should I Use for Students with Learning Difficulties?

Introduction

Adult learners may have disabilities or learning difficulties that significantly affect their academic performance or their testing abilities.

ABLE practitioners walk a fine line when testing students who come to their programs. On one hand, appropriate assessment procedures are essential for obtaining reliable, valid, and helpful test data. On the other hand, when students struggle visibly during testing, practitioners often feel compelled to make testing accommodations to ease their discomfort or frustration. Some of these students may be uncomfortable in a formal testing setting; however, others may have disabilities or learning difficulties that significantly affect their academic performance or their testing abilities.

Some adults may have diagnosed disabilities or learning difficulties; others may have learning difficulties that have not been diagnosed.

Some adults arrive at the adult education program with a diagnosed disability. In these cases, specialists have conducted a series of tests to determine the nature of the adults' disabilities. Information should be available concerning the diagnosis and appropriate accommodations. Other adults enrolling in ABLE programs also may have learning difficulties that have not been diagnosed, making it difficult to determine test accommodations and instructional strategies that might support their learning.

Programs should fully document all testing accommodations.

Testing accommodations are permissible, but they vary depending on the assessment being used and the specific learning difficulty. Whether students have diagnosed disabilities or suspected learning difficulties, programs should fully document all test accommodations.

This chapter provides background information on the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, definitions of various learning difficulties, screening guidelines, and descriptions of appropriate test accommodations and procedures. (See Appendix C also.)

The ADA may have implications for some students in your program.

What is the Americans with Disabilities Act?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the areas of public accommodations and services; this includes educational activities or schools receiving federal financial assistance. Therefore, if your program receives federal or state funding, it must comply with the ADA. This means that some students in your program may be eligible for modified testing procedures.

Appropriate testing accommodations depend on the type of disability or learning difficulty.

What are Disabilities?

Experienced practitioners report an almost intuitive ability to identify which learners may have conditions that affect their ability to learn. Although intuition is useful, it does little to address the question of providing appropriate assessment and instruction for the adults with suspected learning difficulties. Appropriate accommodations and instructional strategies depend on the type of learning difficulty; however, it is not easy to tell the difference between a learning disability and other emotional, physical, or cognitive conditions.

Categories of disabilities include physical, developmental, and learning disabilities, and attention deficits.

In general, four broad categories of disabilities are recognized:

- *physical disabilities*—visual/hearing/speech impairments, traumatic brain injury, orthopedic impairments (missing limbs or congenital birth defects), health impairments (asthma, diabetes, chronic or acute health problems)
- *developmental disabilities*—mental retardation, autism, cerebral palsy
- *attention deficits*—attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

- *learning disabilities*—group of chronic learning conditions thought to be caused by disturbances of the central nervous system, including difficulty with listening, speaking, reading, writing, math, reasoning, and/or visual or auditory processing problems.

ABLE programs often serve adults with a broad array of disabilities or learning difficulties as described above as well as adults with mental health conditions. These disabilities usually have a significant impact on the learners' educational performance. The disabilities described above are chronic: they can often be treated, but they cannot be cured.

How Can I Determine if an Adult has Difficulty Learning?

Intake Interview

Ask students about their educational experiences and any disabilities for which they may have been diagnosed. Ask permission to obtain records from the appropriate specialist or agency.

During intake, ask students about their educational experiences and any disabilities for which they may have been diagnosed. Younger adults may report diagnoses of learning disabilities or other learning difficulties that have been made through their school districts. Some adults will have diagnoses made through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Easter Seal Society, or other community agencies. Still others may have diagnoses made by a physician, psychiatrist, audiologist, or ophthamologist. Discuss with these students the potential impact that the disability may have on their educational progress. Ask permission to obtain records from the appropriate specialist (psychologist, school, audiologist, etc.) for your program's records. These records should include appropriate accommodations which will be helpful in designing an assessment and instructional plan.

Other adults may not have a diagnosed disability. These adults, however, may mention experiences that suggest learning difficulties. They may, for example:

1. mention that they were in special education classes in

school. This information may or may not be helpful, since it doesn't necessarily provide information about the type of disability they may have. This is especially true of adults who attended schools prior to testing that distinguished developmental disabilities from learning disabilities. Prior to this distinction, any student who had trouble learning might be placed in special education classes, regardless of their specific learning difficulty.

2. mention accidents (e.g, head trauma) that seem to have affected their memory or their progress in school.

Adult learners may mention experiences that suggest they may have a learning difficulty although it has not been diagnosed.

Record information about potential learning difficulties in the adults' folders. This information will inform decisions to screen for learning difficulties or refer for additional services. It also may help determine appropriate strategies for assessment and instruction.

Screen for Disabilities

Some ABLE providers report that they screen for learning difficulties as part of the intake process while other providers do not screen anyone. Typically, providers serving adults with the most limited literacy skills (i.e., adult literacy programs) screen as part of the intake process. Providers that focus on adult secondary education (i.e., GED preparation) may perceive no need for screening. Finally, others screen only after the learner has completed an initial assessment, a period of instruction and observation, and a second assessment. If the learner shows little or no progress, the instructor may then screen for suspected learning difficulties.

Providers servicing adults with the most limited literacy skills routinely screen for learning difficulties as part of the intake process.

It is **not** the role of the ABLE practitioner to make medical or psychological diagnoses; however, it is to the benefit of the student and the program if initial screening is conducted when a learning difficulty is suspected. Adults may have more than one type of learning difficulty; they are not mutually exclusive.

It is to the benefit of the student and the program if initial screening is conducted when a learning difficulty is suspected.

In general, eliminate a purely physical cause, such as hearing or vision impairments, first. Then, consider screening for conditions that are more difficult to identify, such as ADD, ADHD, or learning disabilities. Again, it is not the responsibility of ABLE practitioners to diagnose the condition; you only will screen for potential difficulties. Actual diagnosis must be done by a qualified specialist. See Appendix C for more information on screening.

Make Appropriate Referrals

If screening suggests that an individual has a learning difficulty, you should discuss seeking a formal diagnosis with the learner. There are reasons for and against doing this.

If screening suggests that a student has a learning difficulty, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of seeking a formal diagnosis with the learner.

Fowler and Scarborough (1993) mention three reasons why a diagnosis may be advantageous:

1. Adults with learning difficulties might benefit from alternative methods of instruction which may be identified through the diagnosis and identified as part of the diagnostician's recommendations.
2. Adults with a formal diagnosis can access specialized services such as occupational training or special testing accommodations in academic settings.
3. A formal diagnosis—particularly of a learning disability (LD)—may raise the adult's self-esteem. Individuals with LD exhibit average or above average intelligence but have difficulty in processing information. After years of difficulty in school, these adults are often relieved to find that they are not "stupid."

Some students do not seek formal testing.

Although formal diagnosis may be worthwhile, some students prefer not to be labeled and do not seek formal testing. Also, some practitioners believe that formal testing is unnecessary since their instruction is individualized. In the end, the decision to seek formal diagnosis should be left to the learner.

If a student is in favor of formal testing, assist the learner in locating an appropriate diagnostic service.

If the adult decides to seek a diagnosis, the ABLE program may assist in locating an appropriate diagnostic service. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, for example, may take a referral if the individual is also seeking employment. Community agencies such as the Easter Seal Society also may conduct evaluations. Some ABLE providers have developed relationships with local specialists (e.g., psychologists, optomotrists, audiologists) to conduct evaluations.

If diagnostic services are not available, providers often rely on diagnostic skills tests or informal teacher-made assessments.

Unfortunately, it is more common to find that evaluation and diagnostic services are unavailable or inaccessible. In this case, ABLE providers often depend on standardized diagnostic skills tests or informal teacher-made assessments, information from the adult learner, and research on learning disabilities and learning differences to determine reasonable accommodations and appropriate instructional approaches. In any case, it is important for ABLE providers to document the types of accommodations made and instructional services provided for adults with suspected and with diagnosed learning difficulties.

Accommodations for Assessment

Always contact the publisher to determine allowable accommodations before administering any standardized test. Fully document any accommodations you make.

Always contact the publisher to determine allowable accommodations before administering any standardized test. Test companies will have guidelines for using accommodations, and the types of acceptable accommodations may vary considerably. For example, the GED Testing Service allows accommodations for individuals with disabilities who take the GED exam. For students to take advantage of the accommodations, they must apply for a special administration of the exam. A certified professional must document the disability and request specific accommodations. Physical disabilities, visual and hearing impairments, specific learning disabilities, psychological disabilities, and ADD/ADHD qualify a student for accommodations. Accommodations for taking the GED exam may include, for example,

- time extensions
- large print or Braille text
- audiotaped administration
- private testing room
- readers or interpreters to read questions
- scribes to record responses
- frequent breaks

Testing accommodations most often include changes in format or time limits.

Testing accommodations most often include changes in format or time limits. A change in testing format refers to the use of a different medium or method to present the same information without changing the content or the ability being tested. Braille, large print, or readers are examples of acceptable changes in test formats for visually impaired adults. Extending time limits on timed tests is an acceptable accommodation for adults with physical disabilities or certain learning disabilities.

Consider the relationship between a test accommodation and the purpose of the assessment.

In addition to these accommondations, consider the relationship between a potential accommodation and the purpose of the assessment. For example, it is not appropriate to make accommodations for the skill that is being tested—e.g., don't administer the test orally if you are testing reading ability, and don't change time limits if you're testing speed and accuracy.

Summary

The U. S. Department of Education has estimated that between 6% and 30% of the individuals enrolled in adult education programs have disabilities. These disabilities include examples from each of the four categories described earlier in this chapter. Adults whose disabilities affect educational performance are overrepresented in school dropouts, incarcerated individuals, mental health clients, and the unemployed. Also, they are underrepresented in vocational training programs and in the workforce. The National Adult Literacy Survey of

1993 reports that persons with disabilities scored at the lowest levels of literacy.

Providing educational services for these adults is a challenge: How should providers assess these adults' literacy skills? What are the implications for instruction? What are the implications for documenting learner progress? Unfortunately, few answers exist.

The provision of appropriate accommodations is relatively clear when the learner's disability has been professionally diagnosed. No such clarity exists for the majority of adults with suspected learning difficulties who are enrolled in ABLE programs. Providers must rely on screening instruments to identify potential difficulties, generally acceptable accommodations to determine assessment procedures, and diagnostic basic skills tests or informal teacher-made tests to determine appropriate instructional strategies.

Generally, practitioners can base assessment procedures for adults with learning difficulties on several basic concepts:

1. Involve the learners. Ask them for ideas on how they learn and on what types of accommodations are most useful. Help them evaluate and correct their errors.
2. Assist the learners in setting short-term goals. Recognize their successes in meeting these goals.
3. Discuss testing procedures with learners to make sure they understand what is expected.
4. Discuss errors to determine whether the errors reflect a lack of knowledge or if they represent difficulties in processing information or performing.
5. Document information about suspected or diagnosed disabilities as well as any accommodations made for testing.

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Chapter 7

How Can I Select Appropriate Assessments?

Chapter 7: How Can I Select Appropriate Assessments?

Introduction

Many variables need to be considered when choosing tests for an assessment package.

Making judgments about which tests will be used as part of an assessment package is not a simple task. Many variables need to be considered, including a test's administrative and technical aspects, its purpose, content, and format (e.g., pencil and paper, computer-based, or other). All of these variables need to be judged in relation to their appropriateness for your assessment purposes, program structure, and learners. In addition, those who select and use tests must make decisions about whether to use commercially available tests or develop their own.

Read the test description and then take the test to determine on a superficial level if it meets your purpose.

Experts recommend that you first read the test description in the manual to determine if the test meets your assessment purpose. Then, take the test to determine if the content is appropriate. If these preliminary activities indicate that the test seems relevant to your needs, a more thorough examination of the test and manual is recommended.

A well-written manual will describe complex, technical information simply and clearly, without confusing jargon.

This chapter describes the information that should be included in a manual for a commercially developed test. It also includes a checklist to help you examine a test to decide if it is appropriate for your assessment needs. In general, the technical manual should describe the test, its purpose, and the intended audience. It should describe what will be tested and how, and should include a detailed discussion of how the results should be scored, interpreted, and used. A good, well-organized technical manual will provide this information simply and clearly without confusing jargon.

The following sections provide in-depth information about what the manual should tell you about each aspect of test selection. Some sections may be more or less important to you, depending on your purpose. For example, if you are examining commercially available informal measures, such as reading inventories or checklists, then the section on technical aspects may not be relevant to your needs.

Administrative Aspects

The technical manual should help you answer the following questions: Who should administer the test? Is it administered to individuals, a group, or either? What is the administration time? How is it scored? How easy and objective is the scoring? Is training required for administration or scoring; if yes, is the training extensive? How can test results be used in the program?

The technical manual should thoroughly explain how the test is administered, scored, and interpreted.

Technical Aspects

Norming Data

If the test is norm-referenced, the manual should describe the norming group. It should include information about the norming group's age, gender, social class, race or ethnicity, schooling, and geographical location. The norming group should be large, and, more importantly, it should represent the group for whom the test is intended, and ideally, your group. For example, if you are searching for an ESL test, the norming group should include non-native speakers.

The norming group should represent the audience for whom the test is intended, and ideally, your student population.

Validity

Validity means the test measures what it says it measures. *Content validity* is established by expert review. For example, developers of the *GED* test use experts to select test items that correspond to the high school curriculum.

Predictive validity indicates how well the test scores correlate with other desired outcomes. Concurrent validity tells you how well a test correlates with some other measure of the skills.

The technical manual often reports validity in terms of how well the test correlates to some other measure of the skills. This is a measure of the test's *concurrent validity*. The manual may also discuss the test's *predictive validity*. Predictive validity indicates how well the test scores correlate with other desired outcomes. For example, predictive validity is often used by workplace literacy programs to predict whether workers will be able to transfer skills learned in the program back to their jobs. Validity estimates (whether concurrent or predictive) of .5 and below indicate that the test has low validity; estimates of .8 and above indicate high validity.

Examine a test informally to determine if its content is valid for your program and assessment needs.

Practitioners also should examine the test's validity informally to determine how valid it will be for their program and assessment needs. Do the test questions match the content of the program? Does the test provide an adequate sample of the various aspects of your curriculum? Does the test measure the skills or abilities it is designed to measure? Answering these questions will help to determine whether the content of the test is valid for your program.

Reliability

Reliability means a test produces consistent results every time it is administered.

Reliability means a test produces consistent results every time it is administered. It relates to how accurately a test is able to find the "true score" for a person. A true score is simply what real level of ability or achievement the person has. When we give tests, we see "observed scores." Numerous things (e.g., fatigue, poorly worded test items, or too few test items) will keep the observed score from being the same as the true score. A reliable test will reduce the gap between observed scores and true scores. This gap between true and observed scores is the standard error of measurement. The smaller the error, the better the reliability.

The importance of test reliability depends on how you plan to use the test results.

Reliability is usually reported on a scale from zero to one. A value of zero means zero degree of consistency between observed and true scores. A value of one means that the observed scores and the true scores are the same. A test with a high reliability (.8 or above) is important when you are making decisions about individuals, such as using test results to decide if a person will move on to a higher level or new program. If you are averaging test scores to report group results, however, a more moderate reliability estimate (about .6 to .8) is acceptable.

Manuals may report different types of reliability. In general, reliability is measured and reported in terms of time, items, and scorers.

Test-retest reliability provides assurance that the test scores are consistent over time.

- Tests should have stability over time. One way to assess this stability is *test-retest reliability.* That is, if students are given a test and an alternate form two weeks later and their scores are vastly different, neither set of scores are reliable. Test-retest reliability provides assurance that the scores received on the test are consistent over time.

The results on one form of a test should correlate highly with the results on another form of the same test.

- Tests with alternate forms must have *equivalent items*; that is, the results on one form should correlate highly with the results on another form and should produce comparable means and standard deviations. In general, tests with more items tend to more reliable.

Internal consistency means how well item scores correlate with other item scores within a test.

- Reliability is also measured according to *internal consistency* or how well item scores correlate with other item scores. The higher the average of all these item to item scores, the greater the internal consistency reliability of the test. Internal consistency is important because if test items do not measure the same thing, they should be reported as separate scores on sub-tests. Internal consistency is usually reported in one of two ways: split half reliability or *KR-20* reliability. *Split half* *reliability* is figured out by correlating people's scores on two halves of a test. *KR-20* is a more precise measure of internal consistency because it is based on the fact that tests can be halved in many ways. *KR-20* is basically an average of different split-half reliability calculations.

Inter-rater reliability means how closely multiple scorers score a test in the same way.

- Scorer reliability, or *inter-rater reliability*, means how closely multiple scorers score a test in the same way. It is important when scoring is judgmental. For example, inter-rater reliability is more important when selecting tests that assess writing skills by essay than it would be for tests that assess writing knowledge by multiple choice questions. Well-trained scorers help to raise scorer reliability.

Purpose and Content

The manual should describe what skills are assessed and how the results can be used.

The manual should describe what skills are assessed and how the results can be used for screening and placement, diagnosis, and/or measuring gain. It also should provide a description of how the test items were chosen and developed.

Examine the content of the test from the students' point of view.

Examine the test items from the students' point of view. Is the text layout readable and pleasing to the eye? Are the graphics simple and clear? Are the directions written or given orally? If they are written, are they written in plain English? Will a student's reading comprehension interfere with accurate measurement? Does the manual state whether written directions can be given orally? Do the directions provide illustrative, sample items? If the test includes an answer sheet, is it likely to be confusing for your students?

The manual should report how the test was evaluated for test bias.

Tests should not be offensive with regard to race, gender, age, or ethnic origin. The manual should report how the test was evaluated for *test bias*. For example, tests may be screened for offensive items by experts as well as representa-

Consider the test format and its appropriateness for your program and resources.

tives of the testing group. Or, they may have been subjected to statistical procedures, such as obtaining a *bias index*. Statistical procedures, such as the bias index, involve predicting how well a certain group will do on test items, administering the test to the target group, then eliminating those items identified with a high chance of being biased in favor of or against a certain group.

Format

Finally, consider the format of the test. If it is a paper and pencil test, is it durable? Will you need to replace test booklets frequently? If the test is computer-based, do you have the required hardware? Do your students have the computer skills necessary to yield accurate test results on a computer-based test? Can the test be customized (i.e., can you add your own test items)? If the test is performance-based, do you have the necessary resources (like space) that are necessary for demonstrating competency? All of these factors concerning the format of the test must be considered when selecting assessments.

Summary

Programs must consider a test's administrative and technical aspects, its audience, purpose, content, and format when choosing assessments. All of these factors must be judged in relation to their appropriateness for your assessment purposes, program structure, and learners. Commercially available tests should have a technical manual that clearly explains all aspects of the test.

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Assessment Selection Checklist

Test Name ____________________

Publisher ____________________

Type of Test

☐ Norm-referenced

☐ Criterion-referenced

☐ Curriculum-based

☐ Performance-based

☐ Informal (e.g., interview, checklist, portfolio, etc.)

Administrative Aspects	**Yes**	**No**	**Comments**
Training required			
Reasonable administration time			
Individual/group/either			
Alternate forms available			
Ease of scoring			
Scores useable by students			
Clarity of manual			
Cost			

Purpose (Can it be used for:)	**Yes**	**No**	**Comments**
Screening			
Placement			
Diagnosis			
Progress			
Program accountability			

Technical Aspects	Yes	No	Comments
Norming data provided			
Validity data provided			
Reliability data provided			

Content	Yes	No	Comments
Clear directions			
Age-appropriate			
Culturally-appropriate			
Relevent to your program			

List skills assessed	Comments

Format	Yes	No	Comments
Paper and pencil			
Computer-based			
Oral			
Other			

Additional comments:

Strengths and weaknesses:

Ways this assessment could be used in your program:

Chapter 8

How Can I Provide a Supportive Testing Environment?

Chapter 8: How Can I Provide a Supportive Testing Environment?

Test anxiety affects many adult learners and must be addressed in ABLE programs.

Introduction

Test anxiety is a common phenomenon in adult education settings. Adult learners may become visibly uncomfortable when they are placed in a testing situation, especially learners who have avoided returning to the educational setting because of unpleasant associations from their past schooling and testing experiences. They may sweat or sigh audibly during testing; their hands may shake or they may fidget nervously. Many have not taken a test in years. Some may never return to the program if they are tested too soon or too rigorously.

Adult educators must provide a supportive testing environment without compromising the integrity of the test.

Adult educators must provide a testing atmosphere that is comfortable and reassuring, yet one that yields an accurate picture of the adult learners' educational achievements, strengths, and weaknesses. This chapter describes factors within the learner (such as test anxiety) and the program (such as scheduling) that affect the testing situation. It also provides strategies to address these factors in ways that will help to provide a supportive testing environment without compromising the reliability and integrity of the assessments.

Address Learner Factors

Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is both a physical and an emotional response.

Test anxiety is both a physical and emotional response that may affect a learner's ability to concentrate and perform well on a test. Physical responses may include sweating, shaking, or trembling. The student may also experience an upset stomach or an accelerated heart rate. Emotional responses may include a feeling of panic, negative self-talk (*I can't do this,* or *I hate taking tests*), and an exaggerated dread or even avoidance of the testing situation.

Test anxiety has its roots in past experiences.

For many adult learners, test anxiety has its roots in past experiences. Adult learners may have a history of repeated failures (either real or perceived) in school. They may have received negative messages from significant others, such as teachers, peers, or parents, about their ability to do well on tests or in school, and their self-esteem may be low. Some ESL students may have had little formal education in their native countries and may be unfamiliar with the testing situation itself. And, many adult learners may simply have never learned specific test-taking strategies to ease their anxieties. Some or all of these factors combine in varying degrees to create an unrealistic perception of the testing situation.

Practitioners should be sensitive to the signs of test anxiety.

To become more aware of test anxiety, listen closely to what learners say during intake interviews. Do they make negative or self-deprecating comments? Watch learners during and after testing. Do they become visibly uncomfortable? Above all, trust your instincts and knowledge of learners' performance in the program. For example, do some learners do well in class or in tutoring sessions but score far below what you would expect on a test? If you suspect that test anxiety is affecting an individual or a group of learners, address it directly with the strategies in the following sections.

Test-Taking Strategies

Address test anxiety and test-taking strategies soon after students are enrolled.

Ideally, an ABLE program will provide opportunities immediately for students to learn how to be successful in the testing situation. If feasible, a workshop or one or two class sessions should address test anxiety and test-taking strategies. These opportunities are especially important for students who have been out of school for an extended period or who may have severe test anxiety.

Discuss test anxiety; talk about learners' past testing experiences and how they were negative or positive. Discuss how

Teach students strategies to use before, during, and after taking tests.

testing is used in your program and why. Help students understand that taking tests can be a positive and informative experience. Explain that the testing information will help them succeed in the program. Share the following test-taking strategies with your students:

- Get plenty of sleep before a test. Arrive early and be prepared.
- Read the directions carefully. Know the time limit.
- Don't spend a lot of time on difficult questions. Answer easier questions first. Mark questions difficult questions and come back to them later if you have time.
- Clearly fill in the circle for each answer on a "bubble sheet."
- Look over answers to see if they make sense.
- For true-false questions, if any part of the statement is false, the whole question if false. Look for qualifiers like "all, most, or never."
- For multiple choice questions, try to answer the question before looking at the choices. Eliminate obvious wrong answers first.
- For essay questions, look for key words like compare, describe, evaluate, or summarize that give clues for how to organize and write the essay.
- After the test, ask the instructor for more information on incorrect items.
- Practice test-taking! Use exercises, reviews, and practice tests.

Strategies to Reduce Test Anxiety

Some programs may not be able to teach test-taking strategies prior to testing due to time constraints. However, all programs can provide a supportive testing environment that will help learners overcome or ease their testing anxieties. The following strategies can be used before, during and after testing:

All programs can provide a supportive testing environment before, during, and after testing.

- Avoid the word "test," especially if your students seem overly sensitive to the testing situation. For example, you might say, "I'd like you to answer these questions and solve these problems so we can decide what skills to work on. We'll go over the answers together. This will help you be more successful in the program."
- Explain the purpose of the test in clear, simple language. Make sure everyone understands.
- Ask if students have any anxieties or worries about taking the test. Discuss test anxiety and its symptoms.
- Provide relaxation and positive visualization exercises, such as having everyone straighten their spine and take a deep breath. Have them close their eyes and visualize success.
- Let students ask questions before they begin.
- Allow students to write in the test booklets if they can't use the answer sheets, or if they have vision or perception problems.
- Watch learners while they're taking the test. Approach anyone who appears upset or frustrated and offer reassuring comments. In severe cases, you may want to allow the individual to stop taking the test. You can reschedule the test for another time.
- Allow students to review tests after they are analyzed and discuss the kinds of errors that were made. Schedule private meetings to review individual test results.

Address Program Factors

Scheduling Assessments

New and experienced practitioners raise important issues about the timing of assessments. When should we screen learners for initial placement or referral? When is the best time to conduct diagnostic testing for instructional planning? How often should we test to track learner progress either for updating the instructional plan or to collect data for program

Assessment schedules should be based on a program's structure, its assessment plan, and the needs of all the stakeholders.

accountability? No assessment schedule will meet the needs of all ABLE programs. Providers must design an appropriate schedule based on the program's structure, its assessment plan, and the needs of their particular stakeholders. Research on assessment practices, however, points to several strategies for designing an effective schedule for assessment.

Establish consistent guidelines based on the purposes for assessment.

- *Establish consistent guidelines based on the purposes for assessment.* It's important that all program staff understand these guidelines and comply with them. Program administrators should provide all counseling and instructional staff with an orientation that includes a review of these guidelines to ensure that assessment data are collected in a consistent manner. Staff should be aware of the assessments their program uses for screening, for diagnosing skill strengths and weaknesses, and for documenting learner progress. They should understand and use appropriate procedures for administering standardized and informal tests and for recording data.

Involve learners in the assessment process.

- *Involve learners in the assessment process.* Instructors and students should view assessment as part of the learning process. Instructors and students should meet regularly to discuss assessment results and to plan or revise educational plans. Effective assessment should help learners identify learning goals and help instructors and learners plan meaningful instruction. (Students are more likely to recognize the importance of testing when they play an active role in using the information for instructional planning.)

Review testing procedures to evaluate their appropriateness and effectiveness.

- *Review testing procedures to evaluate their appropriateness and effectiveness.* Program planning is an ongoing process. ABLE providers should consider review and evaluation of their program's various components as a process of renewal and improvement. Both internal (e.g., staff turnover) and external factors (e.g., funding requirements) impact a program's ability to meet the needs of adult learners in their programs. Therefore, it's recommended that program review their testing procedures on an annual basis.

Intake and Screening

When students arrive at your program, they should experience a safe and supportive environment.

When students arrive at your program for the first time, they should experience a safe and supportive environment. Avoid administering lengthy diagnostic or survey tests during this first visit. You should, however, describe the program, explaining that you will use various assessments to help them identify weak skills areas as well as strengths on which to build. You may want to administer a brief screening instrument if the adult seems willing to comply. This will give you a general sense of the individual's skill level for initial placement. This screening may be standardized (e.g., *TABE Locator Test*) or informal (e.g., brief interview or cloze passages). Review the results of this screening immediately with the learner or at a follow-up meeting.

Diagnostic Tests and Testing for Accountability Purposes

Diagnostics tests and tests to obtain baseline measures for program accountability should be administered after students are comfortable in the program.

Programs should administer tests to diagnose skills strengths and weaknesses. In some cases, the diagnostic tests also may be used for accountability purposes. In other cases (e.g., the diagnostic tests are informal), a second test—one that allows for the collection of data that can be summarized—must be given to measure learner progress. These tests should be administered after the adult has completed an orientation period, ideally including a class or workshop on reducing test anxiety. Some programs require that students be tested within a certain number of hours after enrollment. It's recommended that you test at or near the end of this period. For example, if you must test within the first 12 hours of enrollment, test at the 11th hour rather than earlier. In addition, many standardized—and some informal—tests are lengthy; however, it's important that students not feel over-tested. Therefore, don't test for more than two hours in one sitting. For longer tests, break the testing sessions into smaller time chunks. The time between administering a pretest and posttest will vary, depending on the assessment. Generally, however, post test after the learner has completed a minimum of 30 hours of instruction. Informal assessments may be administered more often if the results can be used to improve instruction or revise learner goals.

Summary

Adult educators can provide a supportive, yet precise, testing environment by addressing both learner and program factors that affect the testing situation. For example, discussing testing procedures, test anxiety, and test-taking strategies soon after students are enrolled provides a supportive testing environment for learners. Address program factors by establishing consistent guidelines for testing based on the purposes for assessment, involving learners in the assessment process, and frequently reviewing assessment practices. These strategies will help to provide a comfortable and reassuring testing environment, yet one that yields an accurate picture of learners' educational achievements and abilities.

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Silverman, E., & Hanna, J. (1987). *Test anxiety reduction: Student workbook*. Philadelphia, PA: Cora-Neumann Program. (ERIC Document # 289 058)

Appendix A

Test Summaries Information

The test summaries in this appendix supplement G. Jackson's *Measures for Adult Literacy Programs*. Jackson's book has been included with copies of this guide sent to the Pennsylvania's Professional Development Centers (PDCs) and State Literacy Resource Centers (SLRCs) — Advance and the Western Pennsylvania Literacy Resource Center. Individuals may order copies of Jackson's book by contacting The ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation, American Institutes for Research, 3333 K Street NW, Washington, DC 20007. Individuals in Pennsylvania may borrow a copy of the guide and book by contacting the PDCs or SLRCs. Copies of the guide may be purchased by contacting the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, Penn State University, 102 Rackley Bldg., University Park, PA 16802-3202.

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A Day In The Life....Assessment

Assessment Software Program

Author & Date
Developed by the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy at Penn State, in partnership with Curriculum Associates (1994).

Purpose
To assess basic skills through interactive job-related scenarios.

Description
Using a functional context, competency-based approach, *A Day in the Life...Assessment* measures basic reading, writing, math, and problem solving skills through job-related activities. Learners are tested, scored, and evaluated on skills that are critical to obtain or progress in entry-level jobs. The skills are keyed to the *CASAS* list of basic skills. Six career modules are available: Food Services, Health, Maintenance, Retail, Clerical, and Customer Service. Questions are open-ended, fill-in, and multiple-choice style. Intended for learners reading at about a third to fifth grade level.

Administration
Computer-based; untimed.

Alternate Forms
None.

Reliability
Modules had a reliability of about .8 in the field test sample.

Validity
Validity was established by basing test items on detailed literacy task analyses in the target job areas. Content experts reviewed and validated items in all job areas.

Scoring & Interpretation
A Day in the Life...Assessment contains a management system that scores the assessment and identifies learners' problem areas using the *CASAS* skills framework. The scores are recorded on personal data disks from which detailed reports can be viewed on the computer screen and/or printed.

Comments
Available in both Macintosh and IBM/PC Windows formats. Please check for hardware and software compatibility. Will be available on CD-ROM in 1997.

Availability
Curriculum Associates, Inc.
P.O. Box 2001
North Billerica, MA 01862-0901
(800) 225-0248

Price
Complete set for assessment: $499.90 (single user), $1,129.90 (5-pack). Individual modules for assessment: $199.90 each (single user), $449.90 (5-pack). Career Modules: $129.90 each (single user), $299.90 (5-pack of same module). Other combinations and discounts available.

Source
Curriculum Associates descriptive and promotional material.

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Adult Performance Indicator (API)

Author & Date
Kent L. Copeman and Karen A Ribarchik (1986).

Purpose
To measure paragraph comprehension and vocabulary.

Description
Standardized reading inventory serves as a tool for general placement decisions. Measures grade 2-9 reading level equivalents. Not intended as a measure of learning gains. The test is comprised of 50 vocabulary questions and 50 reading comprehension questions, all multiple choice.

Administration
This 20 minute, silent reading test can be administered to individuals or groups. The student or students read and silently respond to questions. Timed, with a five-minute limit for the vocabulary section and a 20 minute limit for the comprehension section.

Alternate Forms
Available in two forms, Form A and Form B. Non-consumable format.

Reliability
Not available.

Validity
API scores correlate highly (.88) with Nelson Reading Test.

Scoring & Interpretation
Measures reading levels from grade equivalencies 2-9. This test can be used for grade level placement in ABE, GED, ESL, special needs, and high school completion classes.

Availability
Hadley Press
Box 147
Hadley, MI 48440
(810) 797-4407

Price
The price of $43.95 includes 20 test booklets, 1 blackline answer sheet, 1 blackline answer key and 1 examiner's manual. Testing kits and other materials available.

Source
Hadley Press promotional material.

Adult Learning Employment Related Tasks (ALERT)

Author & Date
Meryl Lazar, Ph.D. and Rita M. Bean, Ph.D., University of Pittsburgh (1991).

Purpose
To screen candidates for workplace literacy programs.

Description
The *ALERT* test has three components: silent reading for comprehension of a general expository package, math computation, and a writing sample. The *ALERT* reading test is a maze comprehension task in which three word choices are provided for each deleted word. The math section involves completion ofcomputational basic math problems in a two minute period. For the writing assessment, students are given a topic and asked to think about it for a minute and to write on it for three minutes. The focus is on the number of words generated, not on the correctness of the mechanics.

Administration
Individual. Timing varies with each test component.

Alternate Forms
Forms for pre- and posttesting available.

Reliability
Information not available.

Validity
According to the report describing the development of the *ALERT*, the test authors were "unable to validate empirically" the assessment. They state, however, that content validity was high, because the test was an outgrowth of an existing successful curricula.

Scoring & Interpretation
Scored on site. According to the authors, the results of the *ALERT* should be fully integrated into the curriculum. For instance, *ALERT* results should be reviewed as an aid to creating program goals and used to rate program effectiveness as well as student learning.

Availability
Dr. Rita M. Bean,
University of Pittsburgh
5N25 Forbes Quadrangle
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
(412) 648-7211

Price
There is a $5.00 copying charge.

Source
Lazar, M.K. and Bean, R.M. (1991). *Alternative Assessment Measures in Adult Basic Educational Programs*. University of Pittsburgh: Institute for Practice and Research in Education.
Meryl Lazar, Ph.D. Phone interview: 11/11/96

BRIGANCE
Life Skills Inventory

Author & Date
Albert H. Brigance (1994).

Purpose
"To evaluate reading, writing, speaking, listening, comprehending, and computing skills in the context of everyday scenarios and job-seeking situations." For use with vocational, secondary special education, ESL, and adult education programs.

Description
Series of assessments designed to measure specific skills attainment. Areas covered include: reading grade placement, career awareness and self-understanding, job-seeking skills and knowledge, ratings scales (self-concept, attitudes, responsibility, job interview), reading skills, speaking and listening, pre-employment writing, and math skills and concepts.

Administration
Most assessments are meant to be individually administered in a one-on-one situation, but some are modifiable for groups.

Alternate Forms
A "Quick Screen" provides an overview of selected competencies.

Reliability
Information not available from publisher.

Validity
According to Brigance, "(this assessment) correlate(s) with CASAS workplace literacy competency standards, SCANS Foundation Skills, and meet(s) the requirements of the Perkins Act."

Scoring & Interpretation
Criterion-referenced. On-site scoring.

Comments
Goals and objectives software, which facilitates writing Individual Education Plans, is available.

Availability
Curriculum Associates, Inc.
P.O. Box 2001
North Billerica, MA 01862-0901
(800) 225-0248

Price
Life Skills Inventory, $89.95. Learner Record Books (10 pack) $24.95. Supplemental materials and other discounts available.

Source
Curriculum Associates descriptive and promotional material.

BRIGANCE
Employability Skills Inventory

Author & Date
Albert H. Brigance (1995).

Purpose
To measure work-related and job-seeking skills.

Description
This assessment measures 124 separate workplace skills, including: reading grade placement, career awareness and self-understanding, job-seeking skills and knowledge, reading skills, speaking and listening, pre-employment writing, and math skills and concepts. Questions are posed in a work-related context.

Administration
Most assessments are meant to be individually administered in a one-on-one situation, but some are modifiable for groups.

Alternate Forms
A "Quick Screen" provides an overview of selected competencies.

Reliability
Information not available from publisher.

Validity
Information not available from publisher; however, the publisher states that this test correlates with the SCANS Foundation Skills, P.L.94-142, the JTPA, the Perkins Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Employment Law, and the Immigration Act.

Scoring & Interpretation
Criterion referenced. On-site scoring.

Availability
Curriculum Associates, Inc.
P.O. Box 2001
North Billerica, MA 01862-0901
(800) 225-0248

Price
$89.95. Learner Record Books (10 pack) $24.95. Supplemental materials available.

Source
Curriculum Associates descriptive and promotional material.

ESLOA
ESL Oral Assessment

Author & Date
Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA), 1995 (revised).

Purpose
To assess a non-native learner's ability to speak and understand English.

Description
Measures both receptive and expressive language ability. Structured on four levels which focus on beginning and intermediate English. Written to reflect real-life situations. Useful for diagnosis, program evaluation, measurement of student progress.

Administration
Individual. Learner responds orally to questions. Test is terminated when the learner misses more than a specified number of questions. No time limit: approximately 20 minutes needed.

Alternate Forms
None.

Reliability
Not available.

Validity
Not available.

Scoring & Interpretation
Simple, quick scoring.

Comments
ESLOA literature states that the test was formulated using the "Communicative Approach," which emphasizes "natural or authentic interaction" using the English language. This approach evaluates the learner's ability to "negotiate meaning" in English.

Availability
Literacy Volunteers of America
5795 Widewaters Parkway
Syracuse, NY 13214
(315) 445-8000

Price
Cue books are $13.50 each; one answer sheet is provided with each book. Pads of 50 answer sheets are $3.50 each.

Source
LVA descriptive and promotional material.

Literacy Assessment Survey (LAS)

Author & Date
Kent Coperman, M. A. and Karen A. Ribarchik (1987).

Purpose
To measure the strengths and weaknesses of the adult literacy student reading below the third grade level.

Description
This test consists of two parts: an Arithmetic Whole Number Survey, and a Basic Reading Skills survey. The Arithmetic Whole Number Survey measures achievement in addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. The Basic Reading Skills Survey measures discrimination skills, encoding, decoding, sequencing, phonics, and sentence comprehension. Both oral and silent reading skills are tested.

Administration
For individual administration only. Untimed. Consumable format.

Alternate Forms
Two forms, Form A and Form B, are available.

Reliability
None available.

Validity
None available.

Scoring & Interpretation
Manually scored by the test administrator.

Comments
This test can be used for placement into Adult Literacy, ABE, ESL and other programs.

Availability
Hadley Press
Box 147
Hadley, MI 48440
(810) 232-6005

Price
$14.95 for 20 consumable booklets and one examiner's manual.

Source
Hadley Press promotional materials.

Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)
Forms 7 and 8

Author & Date
McGraw Hill School Publishing Company (1994).

Purpose
"To measure achievement of basic skills commonly found in adult basic education curricula and taught in high school and adult instructional programs."

Description
Standardized, norm-referenced test which measures achievement in reading, language, spelling and mathematics computation and application. The TABE Complete Battery was revised in 1994 from the TABE Forms 5 and 6. Significant revisions: more life-skills-based content; the addition of more charts, graphs, maps and forms; the combination of the Reading Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension tests; and the addition of a lower measurement level, the Literacy Level (L), which measures reading level up to the grade equivalent of 1.9. In addition to Level L, the following levels are available: Level E (1.6 to 3.9 grade equivalents), Level M (3.6 to 6.9), Level D (6.6 to 8.9), & Level A (8.6 to 12.9).

Administration
This timed test takes three hours to complete. Students use paper and pencil, and fill out answer sheets.

Alternate Forms
Two versions of each form are available. In addition, the company offers TABE Survey Form, which is a shorter overview measurement of skills, TABE-PC for use with the computer, TABE Español, and a Large-Print Edition.

Reliability
KR-20 coefficients for internal reliability range from .75 to .96 across all subjects.

Validity
Both construct and content validity analyses were performed; test was compared with the California Achievement Test, 5th Edition.

Scoring & Interpretation
The TABE 7 and 8 was normed on four groups of adult learners: ABE participants, vocational/technical school attendees, adult and juvenile offenders, and college students. Between 7,000 and 9,000 individuals took each of the subtests. Norm-referenced scores (scale scores, grade equivalents, percentiles, and stanines) are available.

Availability
Publishers Test Service at CTB/McGraw Hill
2500 Garden Road
Monterey, CA 93940
(800) 538-9547

Price
Complete Battery test books are $54.50 per 25 *for each level*. Answer sheets are $19.00 per 25 *for each level*. Volume discounts are available. Supplementary materials can also be purchased.

Source
TABE/McGraw Hill descriptive and promotional information.

Test of Applied Literacy Skill (TALS)

Author & Date
Educational Testing Service (1991).

Purpose
To assess reading skills in the areas of document, prose, and quantitative literacy.

Description
Related to the 1991 National Adult Literacy Survey, the TALS is adult in content and tone and uses open-ended questions to test applied reading and math abilities.

Administration
Timed. Can be used with either individuals or groups. Each subtest takes 40 minutes to complete. There are a total of 67 questions in all three subtests combined.

Alternate Forms
Form A and Form B available.

Reliability
Information not available from publisher.

Validity
Correlated to the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the U.S. Department of Labor's Workplace Literacy Assessment. Correlation co-efficients not available.

Scoring & Interpretation
Using a score which denotes the number of questions answered correctly, the administrator can convert the score into an indication of proficiency level. An interpretive profile, which relates the score to other skills that the learner possesses, can also be formulated.

Comments
Designed for individuals familiar with American cultural norms and concepts, the language complexity and situational contexts used may make the TALS difficult to use with ESL students.

Availability
Simon & Schuster Workplace Resources
5 Columbia Circle
New York, NY 10023-7780
(800) 395-7042

Price
(1992 information was the most current available.) 10-packs of Test Batteries for Prose, Document, or Quantitative Literacy, $17.50 each. Complete tests sets (25 test batteries) $118.95 each. Administration and scoring manual, $15.00.

Source
Simon & Schuster promotional materials.

Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST)

Author & Date
Eliot R. Long, Victor S. Artese, Winifred L. Clonts, and Michael Callans (1994).

Purpose
To test the job-related basic skills of employment applicants.

Description
Test is "constructed to bridge the gap between school and work by measuring basic math and language skills for the workplace." It "includes specific test content to meet identified job requirements," and "measures how well skills are applied in the workplace." The *WBST* has been reviewed for gender and ethnic bias.

Administration
Paper & pencil with two subtests: the Test of Verbal Skills, and the Test of Quantitative Skills. Each takes 20 minutes to complete, and can be administered together or separately.

Alternate Forms
The Verbal Skills and the Quantitative Skills tests each have two forms. A "Skills Composite" test, a shorter, combined version of the two tests, is also available.

Reliability
Test/retest correlations were conducted and studied to verify reliability. The average reliability coefficient for the Verbal Skills tests was .83; for the Quantitative Skills test, it was .87.

Validity
The *WBST* is both criterion- and norm-referenced. The test was normed on students in school and adults at work; norms are presented by reference group and by job/training program title. Factor analyses, item functioning, item selection and scaling tests were performed to validate the *WBST*.

Scoring & Interpretation
Can be scored on-site, using a Scoring Diskette (IBM compatible) or sent to Wonderlic for scoring and interpretation. A validation service, evaluating the relationship between the job applicants test scores and their potential job performance, is available. Test results are tied to "required math and language skills listed in the U.S. Department of Labor's *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*." The test can be scored by job requirements or grade level. The authors note that the *WBST* does not identify specific areas of skill weakness or assign specific levels of language or math training."

Availability
Wonderlic Personnel Test, Inc.
1509 N. Milwaukee Ave.
Libertyville, IL 60048-1380
(800) 323-3742 Fax: (708) 680-9492

Price
Verbal Skills or Quantitative Skills tests purchased individually: $80.00 per 25.
Skills Composite : $110.00 per 25. Prices include test booklets, answer sheets, manual, and scoring diskette. Discounts available for volume purchases.

Source
Wonderlic 1996 promotional material and *WBST* manual.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

WorkKeys

Author & Date
American College Testing Program (ACT) (1994).

Purpose
To assess learners' workplace skills.

Description
WorkKeys measures learners' competencies through performance-based assessments in eight skills areas: Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, Listening, Writing, Teamwork, Locating Information, Applied Technology, and Observation.

Administration
Each assessment takes between 35 to 45 minutes to complete. Some tests are paper-and-pencil only; others require listening to an audiotape or viewing a videotape to answer questions. Questions on all assessments are multiple choice.

Alternate Forms
None.

Reliability
According to WorkKeys literature, "generalizability studies have found that G coefficients [appropriate for norm-referenced decisions] for Listening and Writing are .66 and .82, respectively. PHI coefficients [appropriate for criterion referenced decisions] are .62 for Listening and .81 for Writing."

Validity
Criterion-related validity studies "found statistically and practically significant relationships between assessment scores and job performance for [selected] jobs." *WorkKeys* is also positively correlated to the *ACT Assessment*.

Scoring & Interpretation
Assessments must be sent into ACT for scoring. Computer scoring provides information on the learner's skill levels, descriptions of skills typically associated with those levels, and ideas/advice for instruction.

Comments
WorkKeys assessments include "skills identified by ... SCANS and by ACT panels."

Availability
ACT — WorkKeys Client Services
2201 N. Dodge St.
P.O.Box 168
Iowa City, IA 52243-0168
(800) WORKKEY Fax: (319) 337-1725

Price
$4.00 per assessment (Reading, Applied Mathematics, Applied Technology, Locating Information); $7.00 per assessment (Teamwork, Observation); $13.50 per assessment (Listening), $12.50 per assessment (Writing.) Complete set: $65.00. Video and audio tapes are extra. Assessment scoring is included in the price.

Source
Work Keys descriptive and promotional information.

Appendix B

Resources

Resources

Assessment

ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation
Catholic University of America
210 O'Boyle Hall
Washington, DC 20064
800-464-3742 Fax: 202-319-6692
E-Mail: eric_ae@cua.edu Internet: http://www.cua.edu/www/eric_ae

Provides research information, bibliographies, information and analysis papers, and other products and services on tests and other measurement devices; methodology or measurement and evaluation; application of tests, measurement, or evaluation in educational projects or programs; research design and methodology in the area of assessment and evaluation; and learning theory.

ERIC Test Collection Clearinghouse
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, NJ 08541
609-734-5737 Fax: 609-683-7186
E-Mail: mhalpern@rosedale.org

Prepares descriptions of commercially available and noncommercially available tests, checklists, instruments, questionnaires, and other assessment and evaluation tools.

Adult Basic and Literacy Education

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090
800-848-4815 Fax: 614-292-1260
E-Mail: ericacve@magnus.acs.ohio-state.edu

Provides information and resources for all levels and settings of adult and continuing, career, and vocational/technical education, including adult education (from basic literacy training through professional skills upgrading), career awareness, career decision making and development, vocational and technical education, employment and training programs, youth employment, work experience programs, education/business partnerships, adult retraining and vocational rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
Indiana University
Smith Research Center, Suite 150
2805 East 10th Street
Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
800-759-4723 Fax: 812-855-4220
E-Mail: ericcs@ucs.indiana.edu Internet: http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec

Instructional materials, curricula, tests/measurement, and methodology for all levels of reading. Emphasis on research and instructional development in reading, writing, speaking, and listening; identification, diagnosis, and remediation of reading problems; all aspects of reading behavior with emphasis on physiology, psychology, sociology, and teaching.

English as a Second Language

ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education
Center for Applied Linguistics
1118 22nd Street NW
Washington, DC 20037
202-429-9292 X 200 Fax: 202-659-5641
Internet: ncle@cal.org

Addresses all aspects of literacy education for adults and out-of-school youth with limited English proficiency. Specific topics include development of reading, writing, computational, and communication skills; programs and projects in employment or vocational training; intergenerational literacy; and program design development, implementation, and evaluation; student assessment and placement; teaching methods and approaches including technology; curricula; learning styles; cross-cultural considerations, and research on second language literacy.

Special Needs

National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (ALLD)
Academy for Educational Development
1875 Connecticut Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009-1202
800-953-2553 or (202) 884-8185
E-Mail: info@nalldc.aed.org

The National ALLD Center, funded by the National Institute for Literacy, promotes awareness about the relationship between adult literacy and learning disabilities. Through its national information exchange network and technical assistance training, the Center helps literacy practitioners, policymakers, and researchers better meet the needs of adult with learning disabilities. Resources include *Screening for Adults with Learning Disabilities*; *Adults with Learning Disabilities: Definitions and Issues*; and *Techniques for Working with Adults with Learning Disabilities*.

GED Hotline
American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle
Washington, DC 20036
800-626-9433 Fax: 202-775-8578

Provides 24 hour operator service with information on local GED classes and testing services. Tests are available in audio, Braille, and large print editions. They have an accommodations guide for people taking the GED who have a learning disability.

Job Accommodation Network
918 Chestnut Ridge Road
Suite 1 Box 6080
Morgantown, WV 26505
800-526-7234

Provides a free consulting service with information on equipment, methods and modifications for disables persons to improve their learning environment. Call from 8 AM to 8 PM (Monday through Thursday) and 8 AM to 5 PM (Friday) (ET).

Orton Dyslexia Society
8600 LaSalle Road
Chester Building, Suite 382
Baltimore, MD 2128602044
800-222-3123

Twenty-four hour voice mail service that receives information requests. From 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM Monday-Friday (ET), call (410) 296-0232 to receive information about appropriate materials concerning dyslexia. Provides information on publications, referrals for testing and tutors, local branches of ODS, and workshops and conferences.

Appendix C

Disability Definitions and Checklists

Disability Definitions and Checklists

The following definitions were adapted from Salvia and Ysseldyke (1995), the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act — IDEA (34 CFR §300.7), and information from the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

Students with ADD have a disability of the central nervous system which affects their behavior and educational performance, most noticeably through inattention and an inability to complete tasks. Other characteristics include a short attention span, inattention to details, difficulty following directions, forgetfulness, and trouble with organization.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Students with ADHD display many of the same characteristics as those with ADD as well as developmentally inappropriate inattention, impulsivity, and overactivity that affects educational performance.

Autism

Autistic students often perform repetitive movements, are extremely resistant to environmental change or change in daily routine, and have unusual responses to sensory experiences. They are usually evaluated by language specialists and psychologists. The term autism doesn't apply if the student's educational performance is adversely affected by a serious emotional disturbance. Autism is difficult to distinguish from severe forms of mental retardation if the student has limited intellectual ability.

Deafness and Hearing Impairment

Deafness is an impairment in hearing so severe that the individual is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification. A student with a hearing impairment has trouble hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects her/his educational performance.

Emotional Disturbance

Emotionally disturbed individuals display one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a degree that adversely affects educational performance: an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health facts; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or, a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Learning Disability

Learning disabled students have significant difficulties acquiring or using listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, mathematical, or social skills. Learning disabilities are presumed to be due to a central nervous system dysfunction. They may occur with other handicapping conditions (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbances), with socio-environmental influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), and especially with attention deficit disorders; however, the learning disability is not the direct result of these conditions or influences.

Mental Retardation

Mentally retarded students demonstrate significantly subaverage intellectual functioning along with deficits in adaptive behavior. Students who are eventually labeled mentally retarded are often referred because of generalized slowness in academic achievement, social and emotional and perhaps physical development, and language ability. An assessment for mental retardation must assess achievement, intelligence, and adaptive behavior.

Speech or Language Impairment

An individual with a speech or language impairment has a communication disorder such as stuttering, lisping, voice impairment (voice is too high or low, too soft or loud), or problems articulating speech or language.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Individuals with traumatic brain injury have an injury to the brain caused by external physical force which resulted in total or partial disability or psychological impairment, or both. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem solving, sensory or perceptual abilities, psychosocial behavior, physical functions, information processing, or speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or induced by birth trauma.

Visual Impairment

An individual with a visual impairment has a problem with vision that, even with correction, hinders educational performance. It includes both partial sight and blindness.

Disability Checklists

These checklists were adapted from the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center 1995 publication, *Screening for Adults with Learning Disabilities: The Role of the Practitioner in the Assessment Process*. The checklists should be used for screening purposes only. The behaviors should be observed over time; several behaviors should be observed before suspecting a disability. It may be helpful to make written notes in addition to using the checklists.

Indicators of Visual Impairment

☐ squinting
☐ eyes water or become red after a short period of work
☐ complains of blurred vision
☐ complains of tired or sore eyes: rubs eyes a lot
☐ holds reading material either very close or very far
☐ closes one eye while reading
☐ letters are written in uncustomary manner

Indicators of Hearing Impairment

☐ asks for repetition of conversation
☐ turns one ear toward the speaker
☐ difficulty in spelling
☐ misunderstands speech
☐ speaks loudly
☐ oral reading is choppy; words skipped, endings left off, repetitions

Indicators of Other Physical Impairments

☐ orthopedic impairments
☐ chronic illness
☐ seizures, fainting, or generalized weakness

Indicators of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

- ☐ difficulty paying attention
- ☐ short attention span
- ☐ easily distracted
- ☐ forgetful
- ☐ inattentive to details
- ☐ makes careless mistakes
- ☐ difficulty listening
- ☐ difficulty following directions
- ☐ difficulty with organization
- ☐ misplaces things
- ☐ doesn't finish tasks

Indicators of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

(Same as ADD plus:)

- ☐ hyperactivity
- ☐ excessive movement, fidgets, squirms
- ☐ excessive talking
- ☐ speaks and acts out of turn, interrupts
- ☐ difficulty with quiet activities
- ☐ difficulty remaining seated
- ☐ active at inappropriate times
- ☐ overly impulsive
- ☐ engages in physically dangerous activities; doesn't consider consequences

Indicators of Learning Disabilities

Academic

- ☐ reading problems: loses place; reads words or syllables backwards; substitutes, deletes, or transposes letters and syllables; rereads or reads very slowly; reading style is halting or jerky; guesses words frequently with compromised comprehension
- ☐ expressive language problems: writes letters or numbers backwards; spells phonetically and cannot remember spelling patterns; reverses letters in spelling; punctuation errors; poor handwriting; poor writing organization
- ☐ math problems: trouble remembering facts and procedures; difficulty copying numbers and working with numbers in columns; trouble with left/right orientation; confuses similar numbers or symbols; reads numbers backwards; trouble following sequential procedures and directions with multiple steps

Physical

- ☐ visual discrimination: inability to detect differences in forms, letters, and words
- ☐ visual memory: trouble retaining a full mental image of what was seen
- ☐ auditory discrimination: inability to recognize the differences between sounds
- ☐ auditory memory: inability to store and recall what was heard

Behavioral

- ☐ low self-esteem
- ☐ difficulty concentrating or easily distracted
- ☐ unpredictable performance
- ☐ poor motivation or extreme drive to complete a task
- ☐ displays memory problems
- ☐ difficulty sitting still
- ☐ directionality problems (left/right, up/down/, north/south/east/west)

Social

- ☐ misinterprets what others say (tone of voice, facial expressions)
- ☐ lacks awareness of personal space
- ☐ difficulty in establishing friendships
- ☐ excessive mood swings
- ☐ inappropriate reactions to the moods of others
- ☐ trouble understanding humor